THE RIDDLE OF THE EMERALDS

By the Same Author

FROM BEHIND THE ARRAS
THE MISCHIEF OF A GLOVE
THE ROSE BROCADE
THE GREY DOMINO
THE SPANISH PRISONER
MY COUSIN CYNTHIA
THE COMING OF AURORA
THE VALLEY OF ACHOR
THE MARK
THE FIVE OF SPADES
MALLORY'S TRYST
HESTER AND I
STORIES OF TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY
THE MIND OF A WOMAN
TANGLED EVIDENCE
THE MISSING PIECE
THE DARK SEA
STRAWS IN THE WIND

THE RIDDLE OF THE EMERALDS

by

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CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD.
London, Toronto, Melbourne and Sydney

First published 1929

Printed in Great Britain

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CHAPTER I

DIANA looked at me from the other end of the breakfast-table over the rim of her coffee-cup. From the expression in her eyes I knew there was a scheme hatching out.

"Yes?" I encouraged. "What is it?"

She put the cup back in the saucer.

"I suppose you can't find out if you *can* do a thing till you do it?" she said, and although the sentence was in the form of a statement there was a note of interrogation at the end of it.

"That sounds all right," I replied, "but you may find out you *can't* do it."

"Well, that would be the same thing," she said thoughtfully.

"Now you've got me!" I objected. "I don't see how being able to do a thing and not able to do it can be the same thing."

"I mean you would find both out in the same way—by trying to do it."

That seemed sound.

"What is it you propose to try to do?" I asked with, perhaps, a hint of trepidation. Diana's schemes were sometimes inclined to the wild-cat variety.

She smiled—and I assure you Diana's smile when not only with her lips, but with those long-lashed hazel eyes of hers, is something to be reckoned with—certainly if you are a man—and even if she does happen to be your wife.

"I can't think why you should be nervous, Goody," she said gently. "I am not proposing to go round the world, or blow up the Houses of Parliament, or get a divorce—not yet at all events, we've only been married a year—or run a new sort of night club, or——"

I put up a restraining hand. "I didn't ask what you proposed *not* to do. There are a good many more things that I hope might be included in that list. It is in what you are going to do that I am interested. I wouldn't dream of attempting to influence you in any way, but——"

"Of course not," she agreed sweetly, "that would be very Victorian of you, wouldn't it? And as I often tell you, you are not really Victorian." I murmured a word of gratitude, but it apparently fell short. "It must have been awful in those days when a husband considered himself entitled to put a finger in his wife's pie whenever he liked, and a woman couldn't own her own clothes."

"To own your own clothes nowadays wouldn't amount to much," I retorted. "Nothing worth fighting about."

"Nothing would have induced me to marry, if I had been born in Queen Victoria's reign!" she finished, disregarding my interruption. She drew a mirror from the vanity-bag lying beside her on the breakfast-table and rectified some invisible defect in her complexion.

"If you start remedying the ravages of the day's wear and tear at nine o'clock in the morning——" I began; but Diana interrupted me, for which I was not altogether sorry, as I didn't really know how I was going to end the sentence.

"I am going to write a detective novel," she announced abruptly. "Do you ever get a sort of longing to put your feelings into words—to express yourself, Goody?"

"Yes," I replied, "often—especially when I cut myself shaving, or miss a short putt at golf."

"You can't cut yourself shaving with a safety razor," she remarked.

"Can't you!" I rejoined. "The razor is yet to be invented that you can't cut yourself with if you put your mind to it."

"And anyway I don't mean that kind of expression," she went on, exchanging powder-puff for lipstick. "I mean something really deep and important."

"Importance is merely relative." I pushed my chair back and drew out a cigar. "You don't shave, you see."

"Shingling isn't far off it," she articulated with some difficulty, owing to the interference of the lipstick.

"You can't cut yourself shingling," I retorted, "so it isn't in the running."

"The reason I am thinking of writing a detective novel is that I am longing for adventure and it doesn't seem to come my way just at present."

"A well-brought-up young woman——" I began.

"Yes, I know," she broke in, "she ought to find sufficient adventure in ordering the dinner—it *is*

almost an adventure nowadays when you never know if you've still got a cook, or whether she has gone away in the night—and doing the flowers, and answering letters, and——"

"My dear Diana," I broke in, "you young people suffer from the most extraordinary delusions about the last century. I can assure you women had many interests in their lives, and they didn't have to go out into the highways and by-ways to find them either."

"Having been mixed up in a murder case as I have, sets a standard it's rather hard to live up to," she observed seriously.

"What on earth do you mean by a standard?" I asked. "I thought you hadn't got any standards nowadays—just did as you pleased."

"Standards in the way of excitement—interest in life, I mean." She studied the result of her excursions into art once more in the mirror, and tucked the implements away in her bag.

"You must remember in that Paterson case the murder itself didn't come near you," I reminded her.

"What I mean by self-expression," she went on, disregarding my remark, "is that I found out in that case that I believe I am really rather good at the detective business, and if you have a flair like that you must give it expression."

I laughed; she was so serious about it.

"It's no good laughing," she protested. "If you don't get a talent like that out somehow, you'll probably be ill."

"You'll get what's called a complex, I suppose, which means giving yourself and everyone near

you a devil of a time till you get your own way. When I was young——"

"Yes, I know, Goody—" Diana always says that for some reason when I refer to my youth—" but if I write a detective story I may not get the complex Anyway, I am going to try."

Again she smiled at me. I almost took her in my arms and kissed the crown of that shingled head of hers, shining golden in the morning light, but being of the new generation, she would doubtless have called it "soppy."

I offered her a cigarette instead.

"About the detective novel?" I suggested.

"I feel I can write one," she said thoughtfully. "I don't believe it's half as difficult as people make out."

"Well, don't be too hard on the police," I remarked. "If one believed all one reads in detective fiction, Scotland Yard must be a state-supported asylum for congenital idiots. Credit them with a spot of common sense now and then."

"As it will be fiction, it will be quite easy to do that." Diana's contempt for the guardians of British justice had been demonstrated on more than one occasion. "They didn't particularly distinguish themselves in the only case I had anything to do with. If you remember, it was you who discovered Adrian Paterson was hidden in somebody else's clothes, so to speak, all the time, not the police. Quite a good idea for a detective novel."

"You thought he was murdered, you know. If you're going to make it into a story you had better make up your mind at the beginning whether he was murdered or not, or you will find yourself in a

tangle at the end. It's not as plain sailing as you seem to imagine." I was not particularly keen on Diana writing a crime novel; we had had enough of it forced upon us in my opinion to last a lifetime.

"I have noticed there are certain rules you go by," she went on, wrinkling up her brow thoughtfully. "For instance—if you say a man's eyes are too close together, or too far apart you may be sure he is the murderer. You have got to make something wrong about him or the reader may get too fond of him and be sorry when he is found out; and you mustn't make him too wrong and unpleasant or they will spot him as the murderer at once."

"If I were you I'd leave crime and criminals to Scotland Yard, and try your hand at a love story," I suggested, pushing my coffee-cup over to be refilled. "I don't care what you young people say—love has not gone out of fashion and never will. In the times——"

"Of course it hasn't," she broke in, "but we moderns don't think so much about it as they used to. Life has got other interests for women, thank goodness——"

"Then," I interrupted in my turn, "what was Maisie Borton doing last week when I caught her with you in the paved court pulling the petals out of a large daisy and chanting the incantation that usually accompanies that ancient rite, 'Loves me—loves me not—loves me——!'"

"She was saying nothing of the kind!" was the indignant interpolation. "She couldn't make up her mind whether she would marry Freddie Mannington or Captain Bidford; 'Mannington—Bid-

ford, Mannington-Bidford ' was what she was saying each time she pulled out a daisy petal, but she repeated them so often that she ended up with ' Biddington—Manford,' which, when you come to think of it, didn't help her much."

I smiled.

" On what frail threads our fates may hang ! " I observed mournfully.

" Though which ever way it had ended she would probably have changed her mind," Diana added as she gathered up the morning's letters and left the room.

We had been married about a year. As Diana put it, long enough to get used to one another, but not long enough to get bored—a point of view which she considered was on the optimistic side. There is less difference nowadays between the ages of twenty-one and forty—of which let me say I am still on the sunny side—than there used to be. The democratic melting-pot that has been so busy during the last decade or so, levelling up here, breaking down there, has readjusted the popular estimation of age in both men and women, and the actual number of years to their credit—or otherwise —counts for less than their attitude towards life.

So when Diana's stepmother, Mrs. Michaelson, whose dislike for me was only equalled by my dislike for her, urged disparity of age as a bar to marriage, I gave her to understand, quite courteously of course, that Diana's opinion on that subject was the only one that mattered at all. If Diana could overlook the distance that lies between twenty-one and thirty-nine, what anyone else—meaning Mrs. Michaelson—thought didn't matter

a tinker's curse. I worded it differently, but that is what it amounted to.

So she had given in with a bad grace and many pessimistic references to the future, and had sought consolation in arranging a wedding—herself in a star part as stepmother of the bride—on a scale that should entitle it to be described as one of the social events of the year.

It wasn't—but that wasn't *her* fault. I may mention here that with the exception of my sister Albinia, who doesn't approve of Diana, and whose chief characteristic is an insatiable curiosity, I have no near relations. That, Diana says, is mainly why she married me. The nearest was an elderly cousin, Bertram Goodlake, who had lived most of his life abroad. I introduce him abruptly, without apology, because it is around him and on account of the tragedy he brought to our door and into our lives that this narrative is written.

My own name is Humphrey Goodlake, a name my familiars, including certain members of the fair sex and the younger generation, for whom I had on occasion played knight-errant in times of stress, have for some reason curtailed to "Goody," and Diana, having known me by this abbreviation since childhood, had continued to use it after our marriage.

With Bertram Goodlake I had kept in touch—if you can call an exchange of letters at long intervals keeping in touch—but I had never seen him since I was a boy at school. Shortly after I had first become aware of his existence he had gone to live at Monte Carlo; from there he had drifted to Florida, and thence to Rio Janeiro, and it was from

that city I received from him a letter that made little impression on me at the time, but that in the light of after events was to assume a very grave importance.

You must forgive me if I appear to be dwelling on insignificant details. It is these very details that make up the sum of our lives, and they can only be classed as insignificant or otherwise in the light of results ; to make the situation clear at the time this story opens it is necessary to dwell on certain circumstances that may not in themselves appear to be of any vital interest.

In Bertram Goodlake's allusions to the future he had regarded me as his heir, and I had gathered his will had been made in my favour as his acknowledged next-of-kin. What that might imply exactly I had no idea, and having already a sufficiency of this world's goods, I had paid no great attention. I knew he owned a house with a few acres attached near the town of Paignhamstead, about fifty miles north of London, because it was there the only interview I could remember to have had with him took place. I supposed it to have been let when he went abroad, but was never sufficiently interested to inquire.

It was called "High Oaks," although the oaks had not appeared to be higher there than anywhere else ; I do remember an unusually tall group of fir trees, and I had a vague recollection of a grey stone building with red-tiled roof and mullioned windows, almost choked out of existence by the rank growth and trees immediately surrounding it. A gloomy place and badly kept, had been my youthful impression of it ; a fitting frame even to my

callow imagination for the long narrow face, pointed beard, cold blue eyes and sardonic smile that I should always associate with my unattractive relative—so unattractive, in fact, that I sometimes wondered why I had kept up the desultory correspondence with him that had stretched over so many years. I could only find the explanation in the old saying that blood is thicker than water.

Bertram Goodlake's hobby all his life had been water-colour drawing. He devoted most of his spare time to it, and I could remember the long low room at High Oaks with water-colours on the walls; whether painted by himself or someone else I had not had sufficient curiosity to inquire. He had a character for eccentricity, thoroughly well-deserved, I should fancy, living in strict seclusion, morose at times, with a puckish sense of humour that led him to delight in impish tricks and sarcastic turns of wit at the expense of his fellow-creatures.

So much could be gathered from his letters.

His second hobby was a passion for crossword puzzles. He referred to them again and again, relating any little feat in the way of a good guess with a sort of complacent glee. He would work the twist of them queerly into his own modes of expression, giving what he would call a "light" at the beginning of the screed, and explaining it incidentally at the end, or in a postscript. Sometimes he left it to me to guess at his meaning—which I never took the trouble to do—and I suspected he might be a tiresome man to live with, talking in enigmas to show his own ingenuity. It appears to be quite easy to acquire the crossword puzzle mind, but to anyone

who, like myself, took no interest in such mental athletics, it would be very irritating.

This last letter I had received from him had come soon after my marriage, and was a sort of crossword puzzle in itself, with its innuendoes and half-completed statements. It gave no address, the postmark showed it to be from Rio Janeiro, and after deciphering it I threw the envelope aside and thought no more about it.

The letter was shorter than usual and plunged straight into the matter concerned. It ran,

Dear Humphrey,

I have picked up some rather fine emeralds in my journeyings to and fro over the globe; they will do for a belated wedding present for your wife. Unfortunately, *my secretary knows all about them.* [Underlined]. If by any chance—or mischance—you should at any time hear of my sudden death—two attempts have already been made on my life, each time by poison, though you may not believe it—find the secretary, and you will have got the criminal. I mention no names, or, if this should get into the wrong hands—and Lord only knows where one's letters may go in these days of Post Office economies—I may find myself in the Courts for libel. I give you the 'light' and should occasion arise, it's up to you to solve the problem. You will find a clue at High Oaks. I have kept my suspicions to myself, but my secretary knows I have written to you—and wants the emeralds, so look out for possible trouble. They are worth a fortune.

Yours ever,

BERTRAM GOODLAKE.

P.S.—Look at the back of the old wall; the sun makes a pattern on the grass.

A mad letter, if ever there was one, and I had

thrown it across the tea-table to Diana with a smile.

"My cousin Bertram must be slipping into his dotage! The poor devil of a secretary is probably quite innocent of nefarious designs—but if the old man thinks he is a crook, it was like him to put him on to me! He'd think it no end of a joke! I expect he has the deuce of a time with the old sinner. To imagine yourself the victim of a plot on your life is the first symptom of incipient insanity!"

"But if the emeralds are valuable he may have really been trying to get hold of them—the secretary, I mean."

"The old man is probably romancing! You can see he is not really afraid of being the victim of foul play," I went on, "or he would take it more seriously. He just wants to get us guessing—and I'm not taking any! He has developed the cross-word puzzle mind, as one may call it——"

"Yes, I know," Diana had broken in, "but——"

"But what?" I asked.

"I hope the secretary won't get the emeralds," she answered, opening the flat ornamented bag that is a necessary part of every woman's equipment in these days, and scanning her small, clear-cut features in the mirror.

"I hope still more he won't get my cousin!" I retorted with a certain degree of warmth, "though I daresay you young people would call the sentiment 'soppy'."

"Not at all—it does you great credit," my wife replied indulgently. "Of course I hope the old man won't be bumped off before his time, but it *would* be a pity if the secretary pinched the emeralds."

"If you were to substitute 'swag' for emeralds, the flower of speech would be complete," I remarked, "but it's thrown away, as Albinia is not here to turn up her eyes at it," and we both laughed. "Well," I went on, "the old man was always a queer chap, but he must be going off his chump to write a letter like that," and, tearing it in halves, I committed it to the waste-paper basket, and thought no more about it.

And now again I am going off at what may appear to be a tangent.

It might be imagined that to have been linked up with one "perfectly good" tragedy would be as much as Destiny or Nemesis, or whoever has the immediate ordering of our fates, would exact from man or woman; that one might be considered to have had one's share. But I have noticed through life that Fate orders otherwise.

It may be there is something more in the ancient science of astrology than is generally supposed; that the planets or stars in the ascendant—I don't know the proper jargon—at one's birth may have a definite influence on the course of our lives. For you must have noticed if you are in the habit of observing as you travel through life, that having been in one bad accident in no way lessens the probability that you will be in another. On the contrary, I have known people who, if there is any sort of accident going anywhere, are always certain to be in it, while others will go scatheless through life, and die without having seen so much as a County Council tram-car run off the rails.

One might almost suppose it possible to be tuned in, so to speak, to accidents, or no accidents, accord-

ing to the position of certain constellations at the moment of your birth.

The same applies to other aspects of life. Anyone who has by chance read my account of the mysterious disappearance of Adrian Paterson, with which Diana and I were so unfortunately mixed up, might imagine we had had our share of crime and violence in this life, and might be free of it for the rest of our days.

But it would seem that the ruling star which drew us into the vortex of tragedy on that previous occasion, was only watching its chance to do it again. Except for an accident in early childhood, connected with a nursemaid and a too interesting policeman, which had left me with a slight limp, my own life had been fairly bare of sensational incidents; but that Diana should find herself mixed up for the second time in her short life with crime and tragedy through no fault of her own seemed a violation of all the laws of probability.

But there it was. We were standing all unknown to ourselves on the brink of circumstances impossible to avoid. Inexorably we were to be drawn into the maze, and through tortuous windings and patient searching only to extricate ourselves at last.

The bolt fell straight from the blue on a fine morning in June.

We were in South Hans Square, and it was about a week after Diana had informed me she proposed to write a detective novel. It would almost seem as though her attention, turned that way, had set the tune for the events that followed.

I was sitting in the paved court at the back of the house, and had just finished my after-breakfast cigar. I am rather proud of my paved court. My man, Rickman, looks after it, and it has an ilex tree in one corner which throws dancing shadows across paving-stones intersected by yellow stonecrop and other rock plants; I was dabbling in the small lily pool in the centre of the court, preparatory to cutting off one of the flat, spreading leaves that showed signs of premature decay, when Diana called to me from the side door leading into the house.

"You're wanted on the telephone," she said. "It's Scotland Yard—quite like old times! But they won't tell me what it is."

I smiled. Diana had found herself up against Scotland Yard—or should I say the Yard had found itself up against Diana!—in the Paterson case, and if it were our old friend, Inspector Brockman, he would certainly reserve his communication for other ears.

It was not Inspector Brockman, however, who spoke.

The message was short and to the point.

Was I Mr. Humphrey Goodlake, and did I know anything of Mr. Bertram Goodlake of High Oaks, Paignhamstead?

Of course I did—he was my cousin. What about him?

The voice at the end of the wire became less harsh in tone. They were sorry to have to inform me that Mr. Bertram Goodlake had been found at High Oaks the previous evening, about nine o'clock, in his library—murdered.

A startled ejaculation left my lips. Murdered! In the first impact of shock, the word seemed to have no meaning. I replaced the receiver with a hand that slightly shook.

CHAPTER II

WITHIN a few hours of the news Diana and I were established in the Paignhamstead Arms Hotel for a presumably indefinite period.

The message had descended so abruptly into the calm round of our daily life that it had been a shock to both of us. I had not known that Bertram Goodlake was in England—hadn't an idea where he was for that matter ; in the vague way impressions of unimportant trains of thought are registered almost automatically in the brain, I had thought of him, so far as I had thought of him at all, as travelling about in possibly outlandish countries, enjoying himself in his own curious fashion with his painting and his crossword puzzles, caring nothing for anything or anybody that did not minister to his own interests.

The last thing I had expected to hear of was his death, and that he had not only died suddenly but died a violent death within a few miles of us, while Diana and I were light-heartedly pursuing our usual course of existence, added a poignancy to the first shock of surprise. Without any real justification for it I felt a pang of remorse.

With his eccentric habits and aloofness, and the impish humour with which he regarded humanity's foibles, I might well have felt no real affection for him—hadn't in fact—how can you for a man you

have only seen once in your life ? But he was of my own kin, and there is assuredly something in the clan idea, whatever may be said by the individualist, for my first feeling was of profound indignation and a burning desire to hunt down his murderer. I took it immediately as a personal affair.

This desire Diana apparently shared.

In the first flush of shocked surprise she seemed in some odd way to blame herself for having helped to bring it about, which was obviously absurd. She argued on some obscure theory of her own that if she had not expressed a wish that something in the nature of adventure or tragedy might happen to add to the excitement of life, this fatal fulfilment would not have taken place. It seemed uncanny, she said, that Fate should have taken her at her word.

" It's as though some invisible servants of Fate had been listening," she explained, " and taken me at my word. I can almost imagine them gloating over the chance I was giving them ! " and she really seemed disturbed about it.

" That's simply morbid," I gently protested, " and ridiculous as well. Also, without wishing to hurt your feelings, it is overrating your importance to imagine the Powers that be would immolate a full-grown man on the altar of your desire for excitement. A thunderstorm to kill a fly. I shall leave at once for Paignhamstead," I added, picking up the A.B.C. to look out a train.

" I am coming too," she announced calmly, and knowing she was sure to go in the end if she wished to, it seemed better to accept it at the beginning.

"Not that you will be of any use," I remarked. "Women are better out of these affairs."

"A wife's place is by her husband's side," she replied gravely.

"An admirable sentiment—but unusual in the mouth of the new generation," I said. "It is a pity Albinia can't hear you."

At which we both smiled—and Diana went with me.

But I paid my first visit to the scene of the tragedy alone; and as the interest of this story depends not so much on the sinister fact of my cousin's violent death, as on the manner in which the solution of it was reached through the slender clues he had left us, I will state the circumstances as briefly as possible and pass on to the sequel.

High Oaks was as gloomy as my memory had painted it. The tall clump of dark firs made a striking background to the red-tiled roofs, adding a note of tragedy in their sudden uprisal against the sky beyond, and the silent watchfulness of their attitude. The mullioned windows, small and set high in the walls of the house, looked out like brooding eyes from beneath the overhanging eaves of the roof. So they seemed to me as I dismissed the taxi that had conveyed me the two miles from the station to the iron gates into the place. Diana had gone straight to the hotel to engage our rooms.

A house deserted for any length of time takes on an atmosphere peculiar to itself. The spirits of the past, perhaps, reassert themselves. Forsaken by living occupants, one gets a sense of unseen tenants moving stealthily in the shadows, and looking down at one from staircase or gallery. I wondered

if my cousin had found anyone to occupy the place during his long absences. I doubted it. My inheritance, if such it were, and I had no reason to believe Bertram had altered his will, had an atmosphere about it likely to have scared the very birds off the trees without this added touch of tragedy to finish it off.

In fact, the constable on guard half-way along the gravelled approach to the house, to whom I had to justify my claims as next-of-kin to gain admittance, informed me that the caretaker and his wife had always refused to sleep under the roof, preferring to do such duties as airing rooms and lighting fires from their own home in the village.

"An' I don't blame 'em," he added, removing his helmet—it was a warm day—and scratching his nose thoughtfully with the brim, "it's a gloomy place and set all by itself. Never no more than a thin trickle of smoke from the kitchen chimney winter and summer to tell you anyone was alive in the 'ouse. Not that the gentleman was ever here in the winter—went off forrin by all accounts, and they never knew, the caretakers didn't, when he'd turn up next. Not much good to a place, sir—begging your pardon—but a good house like that left empty seems a wicked waste."

I agreed with him, adding it would be still more likely to be left empty for some years to come, with so black a mark against it.

"That's right, sir—it don't do no good to a place, a cold-blooded murder don't. Not that it's ever been kept decent like—weeds everywhere, and everything gone to seed." He pointed to the gravel at our feet, moss-grown and neglected and the

shrubberies on either side of us as we walked up the drive, lank and straggling, with untrimmed branches, and in some cases the withered blossoms of a previous season still clinging to the twigs.

My inheritance, if such it were, threatened to be a bit of a white elephant. But once inside the house the prospect brightened up.

The front door opened into a spacious and lofty hall, with a large stained glass window at one end, admitting a flood of light across the stone floor; an oak staircase at one end led to the rooms above. At first glance, the furniture, of which there was very little, seemed to be a curious medley of modern, ancient and foreign. A narrow refectory table ran down the middle, and an almost life-sized model of a Chinaman held a lamp, poised over his head, in one corner. Standing on the step I caught a glimpse through an open door of what was evidently a dining-room, but holland sheets thrown over the table and chairs showed the room had not been used lately.

I had hardly crossed the threshold into the house when I was met by a thickset man of medium height in plain clothes, introduced by my uniformed guide as Inspector Drewsbury of Scotland Yard.

Once more I was asked to establish my claim to admission, and although a visiting card and my own word were all I could produce at the moment, it appeared to be enough, for the inspector's clean shaven, thin-lipped, rather unsympathetic features brightened considerably.

"I am glad to find somebody in any sort of a responsible position," he admitted curtly. "Mr. Bertram Goodlake seems to have had no friends

in this neighbourhood ; the caretaker and his wife, beyond being able to identify the body, seem to know little about him either, when it comes to answering questions."

"He never stayed in England long enough to make friends," I observed. "It was a surprise to me to find he was here. The last place he wrote to me from was Rio Janeiro."

"Do you suppose he had any enemies ? " the inspector asked quickly. "Taken at its face value, this looked at first sight like an ordinary case of robbery—burglar, we'll say, thinking the house empty, sneaks in ; suddenly confronted with owner, shoots him before he has time to raise an alarm, and makes off with what he can find."

I nodded. There was nothing to be gained by blurting out my view of the case too quickly ; nor was I sure enough of my ground to do so.

"That is what you might conclude right away, but there are some odd contradictions about this case. Come and see what you make of it, sir. I have had the body removed to the mortuary at Paignhamstead, but everything else has been left just as it was found."

"So they called you in at once ? " I remarked.

"Yes, they didn't lose much time about that. The outlying districts are apt to apply to the Yard quicker than they did, and a good thing too—a lot of time used to be lost—messing about." He spoke in an abrupt, jerky sort of fashion ; a man of five-and-forty or so, with a quick blue eye and dark hair.

"The chief constable of the county is away," he went on, "and the sergeant at Paignhamstead had

the nous to see this was a bigger affair and more behind it than a common case of robbery with violence. The trouble is there seems to be no one to ask any questions of; nobody's seen him, apparently, except the caretakers."

He had preceded me across the hall while speaking and, unlocking a door on the opposite side of the hall to the entrance, stood aside for me to go in.

The room I entered was long and low, half library, half studio. One end of it was lined with well-filled bookcases, while the other had the appearance of a studio, fitted up with easels and all the paraphernalia of the artist. I remembered my cousin's passion for drawing in water-colours as I noticed sketches framed and unframed propped up on the easels, or lying on an unstained deal table. One large drawing lay face downwards on the floor, which was polished and carpetless. Whether they were good or bad, the product of his own brush or others, I had no opportunity at the moment to decide.

For the inspector was pointing out the spot at which the body was found, and describing the circumstances.

I followed him to the library end of the room, in which no doubt Bertram Goodlake had passed most of his time during his infrequent visits to High Oaks.

The place seemed still to hold something of the extraordinary vitality that would never let him rest, but kept him moving about the world in search of Lord knows what, without, so far as I knew, any definite aims. For a brief moment I could almost sense the queer crookedness of his

outlook, his impish humour and cynical attitude towards his fellow creatures, the dissatisfaction of a more or less wasted life. But it passed instantly, and I looked about me, registering all the details of the scene in which this human drama had been staged.

I had been up against tragedy before, and that not very long previously, but with actual murder I had never been face to face. The most torpid imagination can hardly fail to be stirred when brought into close contact with the terrible sin of murder, and my own imagination is as lively as the next man's.

It was with something akin to awe that I realized the furniture around me, the floor upon which I stood, the ceiling looking down upon me, had framed the sinister scene enacted so short a time previously when a man's life—and he my own blood relation—had been brought to a violent end.

I glanced at my companion, but long use had probably dried up the founts from which an answering glance of sympathy would have sprung. He was busy manipulating a note-book, as though a murder more or less was all in the day's work.

A large kneehole writing-table, leather-covered and stained with the wear and tear of years, standing across the corner by one of the long windows that gave on to the garden ; a couple of arm-chairs, also leather-covered, flanking either side of the open fireplace, a swivel chair at the writing-table, a long, old-fashioned sofa against the wall, a few small tables and chairs, an oak chest between the windows, a light chair or two and a small round table, and the sum of the furniture was complete.

There was also a tall, massive-looking safe, painted green, let into the wall behind the door.

What I noticed at once was that everything was in disorder. The drawers of the writing-table were pulled out and left so, as though the visitor had been too hurried to close them ; the contents lay scattered about the floor. The lid of the oak chest was propped back against the wall, old books and papers that had evidently been in it were lying in confusion on the floor around it. On the writing-table the splintered remains of a wooden box, the lid wrenched off and hanging by one hinge, lay beside a large sheet of blotting paper, across which an unpleasant brown stain traced a delta-like pattern over its white surface, telling its own tale even to an unpractised eye.

The inspector was speaking :

" Mr. Bertram Goodlake was seated there—shot clean through the temple." He pointed to the swivel chair at the writing-table. " His head and shoulders had fallen forward, and one arm had been flung out with such violence that a cup of coffee evidently in his hand at the time was thrown right across the room, leaving a trail of liquid as it went."

" Any sign of a struggle ? " I asked.

" None at all—shot dead as he sat. His assailant must have crept up to the window, found open by the caretaker, and fired the gun off at close quarters, to judge by the appearance of the wound—an automatic it was—found the bullet myself."

His eye travelled to a bookcase standing out from the wall on our left as we stood beside the table.

"It was lodged in the side of that bookcase," he said, "——is still, for I haven't touched it yet—went in at the right temple—came out the left side of the head—clean as a whistle—death instantaneous—on the nail," he added thoughtfully, "——no time to say his prayers—nothing!"

My Cousin Bertram saying his prayers seemed somehow out of the picture, and I made no remark.

"How did you find out I was connected with the case?" I asked curiously.

"Looked up in the telephone book, sir, and took a chance. Nobody here could help—didn't seem to know if he'd got any relations or not—only been back from foreign parts a few days ago—caretaker could tell us nothing—didn't seem to want to—surly beggar. Lucky it turned up trumps—and we got you first time."

I nodded.

"You said the evidence was contradictory, Inspector," I said tentatively. "In what way exactly?"

"Well," he replied, half seating himself on a corner of the table, "there are one or two puzzling points about this affair." This might have been called an under-statement of the case; it appeared to me to be bristling with them, but it didn't seem worth while saying so. "To begin with, an attempt to break into that safe," he indicated the green-painted safe in the wall, "was made by a bungler. Any sort of a professional burglar would have made a better job of it—and come prepared to do it. It's hardly more than scratched and hammered round the keyhole—no real attempt been made to force the lock. That betrays the bungler. Then, al-

though the pockets were rifled, no money was taken, a good gold signet ring was left undisturbed on his finger—wrist-watch left on his wrist. That doesn't look like a professional housebreaker."

The inspector paused, to allow his words, I supposed, to sink into my own unprofessional brain.

"Against that," he finished impressively, "it's only the professional who carries a revolver—and moreover as far as I can make out, beyond Mr. Goodlake's own and those of the caretaker and his wife, which we have identified, there isn't a finger-print to be found anywhere!"

CHAPTER III

"WHAT do you make of that?" I asked.

"That the stranger, whoever he was, took care to leave none—which rather destroys the bungler theory and shows the crime was premeditated. A mixture of cunning and inefficiency. It's puzzling!" He frowned, his alert blue eyes glancing round the room.

"It may be he was interrupted before he had time to make any headway on the safe," I suggested.

"Who would have interrupted him? There was nobody in the house except Mr. Goodlake himself—so far as we know."

"Why should it not have been he?"

"Because," the inspector explained slowly, "Mr. Goodlake was evidently taken by surprise—seated in his chair. You can tell that by the coffee-cup—he was shot from behind—at close quarters. No, sir," he went on in his odd, jerky way, "the shooting was done first—the place rifled afterwards. The man probably watched the caretaker out of the house from a place of concealment—imagined he had a clear field—and possibly thought he heard somebody coming—may even have heard the caretaker—Dawkins his name is—returning to the house—and got the wind up."

"There were some jewels—emeralds, worth a good bit. Seems as if it was someone who knew

of them that had been having a look round," I remarked, glancing at the surrounding chaos. "Where was this man, Dawkins, at the time?"

"Half-way down the drive when the shot was fired. So he says—but it's no sort of an alibi—nothing but his own word for it."

"How does he know?" I asked quickly. "Did he hear the shot?"

"Seems he did," the police officer replied, "—thought it was a tyre gone burst in the road—went on to the gate and was surprised to find the road empty both ways when he expected to find a car in trouble near by—and thought no more about it. That's his story. May be true—may not."

"And he heard it about the time the shot must have been fired?" I asked.

The inspector nodded.

"There or thereabouts—might a' been a bit after eight, or a bit before nine."

"And no one else on the place?"

"He swears there was no one on the place but himself—and Mr. Goodlake, of course."

Whether the criminal had or had not thought he heard someone approaching seemed a profitless line to pursue. If he were a professional thief, why had he taken no money or valuables? The inspector was right; the absence of finger-prints and the automatic, told one story; the futile attempt on the safe, another. There seemed no coherence in his methods.

"Who found him—the body, I mean?" I asked after a pause.

The inspector rose from his perch on the table

and walked restlessly about the room, his keen blue eyes roving from object to object as he talked.

"Dawkins found him—seems more indignant about the fright he got than anything else! He had brought him in a bit of cold supper about 7.15; went in again at 8 o'clock, with a cup o' hot coffee, and took the tray away. Mr. Goodlake was then alive and well—so he says—sitting at the writing-table writing a letter. He—Dawkins—washed up and put things straight downstairs—says his wife would a' given him a telling-off in the morning if he didn't—locked up as usual and started down the drive for his cottage in the village—watched, we may be sure—if his story is true—by the criminal, hidden somewhere in the bushes."

"Was it then he heard the shot?"

"Half-way along the drive—which is about a quarter of a mile long, with a curve in it, if you remember, sir—he heard what he knows now must have been the shot. As he stood looking over the gate at the empty road he remembered Mr. Goodlake had said he wanted a message left at the post office, but he hadn't told him what it was. So he went back to the house.

"All this took time, of course—Dawkins isn't much of a mover," he went on, ceasing his restless perambulations and standing by the writing-table again. "He let himself in by the back door, crossed the hall to the library—making noise enough to scare the devil himself, I'll be bound—opened the door—found Mr. Goodlake still sitting where he'd left him—head and shoulders fallen forward on the table—shot dead—place ransacked.

He got the shock of his life—he says—and he'll be obliged if the next owner will find another caretaker, as he 'ain't takin' any more,'" he finished with a short laugh.

"Does that mean he's going to do a bunk?" I asked.

"No fear! I'll see to that! He had the sense to leave everything as he found it and to go and fetch Batt—the constable in the village, who 'phoned straight off to the sergeant at Paignhamstead. He came out by car, bringing the police doctor with him, and arrived on the scene before 10 o'clock."

"Did the doctor say how long Mr. Goodlake had been dead?"

"Somewhere about an hour. Not that his testimony was needed, if Dawkins's story is true. It confirms it so far. I hear Dawkins coming in now," as the sound of shuffling footsteps echoed through the hall. "I sent for him and his wife. A bit of cross-examination may get something more out of them—they were the last people to see Mr. Goodlake alive, so far as we know—bar the murderer."

A perfunctory knock at the door was immediately followed by the entry of Mrs. Dawkins, with her husband in tow. I put it like that, because it was so evidently his customary attitude in domestic life. Mrs. Dawkins was small, sharp-featured, very short-skirted, hair bobbed anyhow, an apron longer than the skirt hanging on one side, and a string of pearls—that had never had even a bowing acquaintance with oysters—round her neck.

She began to talk before the inspector could open his mouth.

"A pretty pass things has come to—when a lady what's done nothing—except be fool enough to oblige in looking after somebody else's 'ouse—is marched up through the village willy-billy by the policeman—and a 'usband what can't say bo to a goose follerin' like a lamb be'ind!" And if looks could wither, Dawkins would have wilted where he stood.

"Come, come, Mrs. Dawkins——" Inspector Drewsbury began; but his turn had not yet arrived.

"Don't you dare say 'Come, come' to me—inspector though you may be! I'm a grown woman I am," she cried, facing him, hands on hips, "and I ain't done anything the law can put on to me——"

The inspector's attempt at a smile faded into something more austere. He pointed to a chair.

"Sit down there, Mrs. Dawkins," he said quietly. "The law is not trying to put anything on to you. I am only going to ask you a few questions. I'm sure both you and your husband are only too anxious to help the law to find out who committed this horrible crime."

Her husband gave her a persuasive push towards the chair.

"Sit down, Bet," he muttered. "It ain't no manner o' use making a fuss."

"'Ow do *you* know?" she rejoined, turning on him. "You never made a fuss about anything in your life! Takes it all lyin' down, you do. Well—I ain't going to and the sooner this——" she glanced at the inspector and quailed before the look in his eye. The sentence petered out in a thin whine.

"Now, Mrs. Dawkins," he admonished as she sat herself protestingly on the edge of the chair indicated, "I am only going to ask you a few straight questions and I want straight answers. You and your husband have been caretakers here for Mr. Goodlake for some years, I believe?"

"Ten years or more—and not much in it. Wot with comin' up to air the rooms, wet or fine, lightin' fires to keep the damp out, and me with rheumatics in me joints——"

"I quite understand," the inspector interposed. "And was Mr. Goodlake a great deal away from home?"

"Mostly." Mrs. Dawkins sat very upright, still on the edge of the chair, her eyes snapping viciously now and then as she kept them fixed on her interrogator's face. "Mr. Goodlake 'e preferred to be in furrin parts instead of being content to live in England like a Christian gentleman. I don't 'old with furrin parts, I don't—not when——"

"I expect you're quite right, Mrs. Dawkins." The inspector again stemmed the flood of her loquacity. "How long had Mr. Goodlake been here, at High Oaks, this time?"

"'Bout a week," she replied promptly. "I know it was a week ago he come, because I was awashin' out Dawkins's Sunday shirt what 'e'd spilt 'is cup o' tea down the front. The mess that man——"

"And how long before that was it since Mr. Goodlake's last visit?"

"Couldn't tell yer—'bout a year," she replied, ruminating, "—or a bit more."

"'Twas last May year, sir," her husband volunteered. "Mr. Goodlake was here for ten days or a

couple o' weeks. After that he went to somewhere in South Ameriky, I understood, and we never 'ad word or sight of 'im till 'e arrived 'ere a week ago, and sent word down for the key of the house and to my wife 'ere, as 'ow 'e'd want 'is bit o' cooking done as usual."

"Do you know if he had any visitors during this last week?"

"No," Mrs. Dawkins broke in, "'e never 'ad no visitors—never—at no time."

"Seems he had *one* anyway," the inspector remarked grimly.

Mrs. Dawkins suddenly sat more upright than ever, and snapped her eyes.

"There was somebody——" she began, and stopped short.

"Yes?" the inspector encouraged. "Somebody who came to see Mr. Goodlake?"

"Somebody who came to see the 'ouse," she replied.

Her questioner looked from one to the other, but Dawkins only shook his head.

"Go on, Mrs. Dawkins—tell us about the visitor who came to see the house."

"I can't," was the disappointing reply, "because I never saw 'im myself. It was one day—about two days before Mr. Goodlake came hisself—I was up 'ere airin' the rooms, it bein' a hot day and not so much as a breath o' wind, and when I was up in one o' the bedrooms I 'eard a motor-car come along the lane at the foot o' the field and come to a stop. I could 'ear it through the open winder, and thought nothin' of it. After all, it ain't nothin' to make a song about—motors are always buzzin' about like

bees through the village. There ain't nothin' in that——"

"Then what particularly makes you remember it?" the inspector urged.

"'Coz after I went downstairs again to the kitchen, I 'eard somebody goin' quiet like through the bushes under the pantry winder, a-creepin' round the 'ouse, and I waited for the front door-bell to ring so I could go and tell 'em to clear out and nobody wasn't at 'ome. I don't 'old with 'aving to answer door-bells hour in hour out——"

"The door-bell at High Oaks doesn't seem to have been giving much trouble to anybody," the police officer remarked. "Did it ring on this occasion?"

"No, it didn't. Whoever it was thought better of it. I waited a bit, then went out o' the back door to 'ave a look round. There wasn't nobody there—but on the path through the bushes leading from the back door round the 'ouse to the drive I picked up one o' them there cigarette-cases, and I'll swear it weren't there when I come along in the morning. And that's all I can tell yer, and I'd say the same if all the archangels of ——"

"I am sure you would, Mrs. Dawkins," the inspector interposed hastily. "Have you got the cigarette-case you picked up?"

"No, I ain't," she retorted, snapping her eyes at him again, "tain't likely—not with the police 'anging round and saying as like as not I was appropriatin' it to my own uses—and me never smoked the nasty things in my life, nor ain't goin' to. The money Dawkins 'ere wastes——"

"If you haven't got it, where is it?" the

inspector asked, a sterner note in his voice. "It may prove a valuable bit of evidence. You must produce it, please."

"I ain't one o' them tricksters what produces rabbits out of 'is 'at!" she retorted tartly, "so don't you talk to me as if I was. Look in the 'all table drawer and you'll find it."

At a nod from the police officer I slipped out of the room and looked round. While so occupied, Mrs. Dawkins's voice continued to drift out from the library; she was evidently taking advantage of the interlude in cross-examination to expound her views on life in general and on the force to which the inspector had the honour to belong, in particular.

"The police ain't no good—not when there's anything to be done," her shrill voice proclaimed stridently. "Here's a peaceful old gentleman, a-sittin' in his study, gets shot through the 'ead, and England as full of police as an egg is of meat! Why didn't they stop it?—that's what I says—that's what they're for, ain't it? If they're for *use*, they'd better stop the murders before they 'appen! If they're for h'ornament——" a significant pause followed, and I could easily picture an embarrassing situation for the inspector, whose personal appearance was on the homely side and, as the saying is, nothing to write home about.

"That'll do, Mrs. Dawkins. I am not asking for your opinion on the police," Drewsbury's voice replied, a trifle sharpset and, thinking the moment for intervention was ripe, I pulled out the drawers in the long narrow table in the middle of the hall; in the third I opened I found the cigarette-case.

"Silver," I remarked, handing it over to the inspector, "with something inscribed on it."

He held it to the light and we read, engraved diagonally across the case:

"—and all your trouble end in smoke!"

"Looks like the end of a couplet, or a tag of some sort," I remarked.

He nodded, slipping it into his pocket.

"Something of a clue there, perhaps. When you found the body, Dawkins, was the window beside the writing-table open or shut?"

For an instant the man hesitated.

"Open, sir," he replied. "Mr. Goodlake mostly had the windows open—liked the fresh air 'e did."

"A fresh air fiend—that was what 'e was!" Mrs. Dawkins hastened to supplement, incommoded, no doubt, by the period of enforced silence. "Lettin' in all the dirt and dust when there was no need to! I'd like to see Dawkins a-talkin' about fresh air in my 'ouse—that I would! The winders ain't opened from one year's end to another, and 'oo's the worse for it, that's what I'd like to know? Fresh air!—air's air all the world over. All you want a winder open for is to shake the mats out of, and the front door's good enough for that!"

At this point Mrs. Dawkins ran down. I wondered the police officer allowed her so uninterrupted a flow; he probably hoped to pick up unconsidered trifles in the way of information if she was encouraged to talk. To the ear of the layman there didn't seem much in it.

"You are sure the window was open?" he repeated to the man, whose eyes turned instinctively to the window in question; instantly his features

were transformed into a look of such utter astonishment that I, too, turned and looked.

Diana, in a very short skirt—one of her shortest—and yellow jumper, was standing on the threshold of the long window opening into the garden, outlined against the light.

The inspector turned at the same moment.

"Who are you?" he asked sharply. "How did you get here? Did you come in by the gate?"

"Dear me, no," she answered calmly. "What would be the sense of trying to get in by the gate with a policeman on guard? I came in through a hole in the fence. There's quite a big one half-way down the field."

CHAPTER IV

FOR a moment Inspector Drewsbury stared at Diana in mute astonishment, so taken aback by her serene imperturbability that words evidently failed him.

I smothered a smile and stepped forward.

"The lady is my wife, Inspector. I am sure she has no wish to do anything contrary to regulations."

"Are there any special regulations about holes in fences?" Diana asked, stepping into the room. "I have torn my jumper getting through it." She displayed a small rent with a daffodil-coloured thread hanging from it. "It would be much more sensible to let one come in at the gate."

"As a matter of fact, no one is wanted here at all, madam—except on business," the inspector said, recovering his official manner.

"I am on business," Diana replied sweetly.

Hearing the door into the hall close gently, I looked round. Mrs. Dawkins and her husband, taking advantage of the diversion, had silently vanished; the inspector having all he could manage for the moment, took no notice of their unauthorized withdrawal. I was interested to see how he would deal with the situation in hand.

There are means of suborning the police other than coin of the realm. There is nothing in the regulations, I believe, about golden hair with a

sunny wave in it, hazel eyes demurely veiled, and a provocative smile that can be turned on and off when required.

"May I ask what that business is, madam?" he asked suavely, only half-appeased by my introduction.

"Certainly," Diana replied, moving farther into the room, and seating herself on the corner of a low bookcase, "although I consider, as Mr. Humphrey Goodlake's wife, there is no need to apologize for my presence in what we may presume to be his house."

"That is as it may be," was the non-committal reply, "but I am sure Mr. Goodlake will have no objection if I ask again—what is your business here?"

"Diana!" I protested, thinking it time to intervene, "my dear girl—you're much better out of it, you know. There's no reason why you should mix yourself up with the affair at all. I can tell you exactly what has happened afterwards."

"I am more interested in what is going to happen," she retorted. "I consider it a solemn duty to find out who murdered your poor Cousin Bertram."

"You can leave that in the hands of the Yard, miss—madam," the inspector corrected. Diana looked so absurdly young in that yellow jumper and a close-fitting brown hat drawn over her golden head that there was every excuse for the slip. "Interference from outsiders generally leads to trouble."

Diana looked round the room before replying.

"I don't know how you would get on without outsiders when it comes to asking questions.

Where would you get your evidence from ? " she said calmly, and the sally eliciting no reply, cast her eyes over the paper-bestrewn floor and the opened drawers. There was a half-smoked pipe lying near the edge of the writing-table, placed there no doubt while the doomed man drank his last cup of coffee ; I could see her eyes cloud as they fell on this pathetic touch of realism, then flash indignantly as they turned again to the inspector. But, true to her generation, no hint of sentimentality was allowed to colour her next remark.

" What are you going to do about it, Inspector ? " she asked pleasantly ; and producing the ever-present mirror and powder-puff, proceeded to attend to her nose as though nothing else in the universe really mattered.

The representative of law and order turned helplessly in my direction with an appeal as of man-to-man in his face. I really did not see what harm Diana was doing, and said so.

" You have done all that is important here, Inspector—taken your notes, photographs and so on, I presume, searched for finger-prints—in fact, you said as much. Also——" I was going to add, " the body has been removed to the mortuary," but there seemed no need to emphasize the unpleasant actualities with Diana present, so I asked if it was necessary I should do anything with regard to identification.

" The caretaker has already done all that is necessary," Inspector Drewsbury replied, " though perhaps it would be more satisfactory if you were to confirm it. I can take you into Paignhamstead in the police car, sir."

Diana, her finishing touches completed, replaced the implements in her bag and rose to her feet.

"If you remember," she remarked, looking earnestly at the police officer, "I said I had come on business."

There was a gentle irony in the inspector's smile, betraying failure to reconcile "business" as understood by Scotland Yard with daffodil-coloured jumpers, hazel eyes and a hint of golden curls beneath a brown felt hat.

"What do you mean by business?" he questioned tersely.

She gently shrugged her shoulders.

"The new Oxford Dictionary will give you the actual meaning of the word," she replied gravely. "I will put it differently. I am the bearer of information that may be useful to you."

"Indeed! What is it?" His manner was so short that for a moment Diana seemed to be going to resent it. Her lips closed sharply; apparently she thought better of it.

"I fancied that as the news had only just reached the hotel as I arrived there, you might not have heard it. Have you?"

"What news?" the other repeated impatiently.

"Then you haven't," she said calmly. "I wanted to make sure, or you might say afterwards you knew it all the time."

The inspector bit his lip. He was probably unaccustomed to having the "third degree" applied to himself.

"If you will come to the point, madam——" he began.

"A lunatic—or a mentally deficient—has es-

caped from a home somewhere near Paignhamstead," Diana continued, " and the general idea is that he is responsible for the murder."

The inspector turned sharply to me. " Had you heard anything about this ? "

I shook my head. " I drove here straight from the station, so how should I ? When is this madman supposed to have escaped ? " I asked, looking at Diana. " A good deal would hang on that."

" About two o'clock yesterday afternoon. Lots of time for him to have done it," she rejoined.

" It would account for some of the features of the case," the inspector observed, pulling his thin under-lip thoughtfully into creases with finger and thumb. " No money or valuables stolen—the futile attempt on the safe. Doesn't seem to be a lot of intelligence at the back of it. I said it was an amateur who'd done it. But he'd have left fingerprints."

" He might have worn gloves," Diana suggested. " There's no reason to suppose that because he is a lunatic he hasn't got any gloves."

" And how could he have got a gun—automatic?" he added, frowning.

" How does anybody get a gun ? " Diana asked. " That's what you have got to find out."

" By the by, Inspector," I interposed, " was the automatic with which my cousin was shot found anywhere on the premises ? "

" No, sir ; but we haven't half searched the place yet, either inside or out. A couple of my men are hunting in the shrubberies now. I wonder one of them didn't see you come in, madam," he turned to Diana.

"So do I," she replied casually. "I just stepped through the hole in the fence and walked across the field without doing any sleuth business. There wasn't a sign of anybody anywhere. Hadn't you better set about catching the lunatic?" she suggested. "They seem rather worried about it at the hotel. A lunatic at large is all very well in a book, but one looks at it differently in real life. I am thinking of writing a detective novel myself, you see, and hoped you might give me a hint or two, but——"

This thrust was interrupted by the police officer, who put a hand in his pocket, turning his back rather markedly on Diana.

"This was found, sir—on the table—when the body was removed. I hesitated to hand it over—wasn't too sure you were—well—who you said you were. We have to be careful. This letter may mean something to you—no good to me. It looks like a crossword puzzle, which I was never interested in. Too many of them in real life. It was lying on the blotting-paper—body fallen forward on it."

He handed me a sheet of paper, marked irregularly with the same ominous brown stain as the blotting-paper, the first page covered with my cousin's small, oddly-crabbed handwriting.

"A letter? Apparently addressed to myself," I remarked.

"So I imagined," Inspector Drewsbury agreed. "Let me know if you make anything of it. See you later, sir. I'll be off now to make inquiries about this lunatic—if there is one," he threw a glance in Diana's direction which, fortunately, she did not notice. "You can get the caretaker to put

things straight as soon as you like—got all I want—photographs and so on—and not much to go on at that!" and rather to my relief he left the room, crossed the hall and banged the front door behind him.

I turned to Diana at the sound. "You don't really think this lunatic committed the murder, do you?" I asked in some surprise.

"Of course not." She sank into an arm-chair and lit a cigarette. "But it's good enough for Scotland Yard to go on with."

I stared at her. "My dear Diana——" I began, "the London police force——"

"I know—it's the best in the world and all that," she broke in, "but you and I know well enough who committed the murder!"

"What do you mean? You can't make up your mind like that straight off."

"Can't I?" was the calm retort. "It was the secretary, of course, who did it—just as your Cousin Bertram prophesied. But I want to have a quiet look round before we put the inspector on to it."

"Look here, Diana," I protested, "it's no manner of use getting it into your head that you are any good at the detective business. As for saying you know who did it——"

"Don't you remember the letter, Goody? Your cousin himself told you who did it—or rather, who was going to do it, which comes to the same thing."

"I don't remember exactly what he said, as I didn't keep the letter."

"But I did," was the rejoinder, "and a jolly good thing too! You tore it in half and threw it in the waste-paper basket; but I picked the two

halves out and kept them; I thought it quite possible they would come in useful some day. You say I am no good at detective business, but I don't call that so bad for a beginning. If it hadn't been for me that letter would have been thrown away into the dustbin, and there would have been no official record of your Cousin Bertram's opinion. The police wouldn't have believed a word we said about the secretary—or possibly about the emeralds—and the man would have got off scot-free, and his best girl worn my emeralds for the rest of her life." She blew a cloud of smoke into the air and went on: "It was a jolly good move on my part, and it's ridiculous of Scotland Yard to talk like that about outsiders—as if they did everything off their own bat! I don't mean to say they are not useful—especially in Piccadilly Circus about six o'clock—but as for doing without 'outsiders'—why, if there weren't any outsiders there wouldn't be any crooks—and where would they be then, I'd like to know!"

She looked so pleased with herself I felt it was up to me to say something that would knock the feather out of her cap. Unfortunately, I couldn't think of anything.

"I've got the letter here," she added, tapping the flat leather bag that lay in her lap, "but let's have a look at that other one first."

I turned my attention to the paper in my hand. . . . The date written below the stamped address was of the preceding day.

"Not twenty-four hours since those words were written by a hand as warm and alive as my own! It's hard to believe it!" I muttered.

"Read it out," Diana suggested; "tacked on to the other, we may be able to make something of it."

I sat down beside her, spread the letter out on the table, and read:

Dear Humphrey,

The last letter I wrote to you was from Rio, more than a year ago, and just before I paid a flying visit to High Oaks. It amused me then to set you something of a cross-word puzzle—you know my fancy for that sort of problem. Now, however, I am inclined to regard the matter I spoke of more seriously. My secretary, who thinks I carry the gems on my person, and to whom I have given the——

At this point, at the bottom of the page, it ended abruptly.

"What do you make of that?" I asked, looking at Diana.

She shrugged her shoulders and rose to her feet.

"How was the sentence going to end, I wonder?" I stared at the words as though inspiration might come that way, "'——to whom I have given——'"

"The sack," Diana suggested.

"Or the emeralds," I supplemented.

"No," she said decidedly. "Cousin Bertram distrusted the secretary, and wouldn't have given him the emeralds. It's much more likely to have been the sack."

"We'll let it go," I rejoined, "it doesn't help us on much anyway. Let's have a look at the other letter."

Diana drew the torn halves from the bag and handed them to me.

"I wonder what made you keep it ?" I remarked.

"I keep on telling you I have a flair for sleuthing," she rejoined, "and I got a hunch somehow it would be useful."

"If you let Albinia hear you talk in that highbrow English, she'll have a fit," I observed, piecing the two halves of the letter together and spreading them out on the table beside the other.

Diana made no answer to this ; she and my sister Albinia, who was a year or so older than myself, rarely saw eye to eye.

I read the letter salved from the waste-paper basket, Diana looking over my shoulder.

Dear Humphrey,

I have picked up some rather fine emeralds in my journeyings to and fro over the globe ; they will do for a belated wedding present for your wife. Unfortunately, *my secretary knows all about them.* If by any chance—or mischance—you should at any time hear of my sudden death—two attempts have already been made on my life, each time by poison, though you may not believe it—find the secretary, and you will have got the criminal. I mention no names, or, if this should get into the wrong hands—and Lord only knows where one's letters may go in these days of Post Office economies—I may find myself in the Courts for libel. I give you the 'light' and should occasion arise, it's up to you to solve the problem. You will find a clue at High Oaks. I have kept my suspicions to myself, but my secretary knows I have written to you—and wants the emeralds, so look out for possible trouble. They are worth a fortune.

Yours ever,

BERTRAM GOODLAKE.

P.S.—Look at the back of the old wall ; the sun makes a pattern on the grass.

There was a pause when I had finished reading.

"Well," I said, "what next?"

She shook her head.

"We must hunt for an old wall—where the sun makes a pattern on the grass," she said slowly. "I suppose he means on these premises somewhere, as he says the clue is here."

"But he wouldn't bury valuable emeralds behind an old wall!" I remonstrated.

"Nobody knows what he'd do—and he apparently has," she retorted.

"Let's sum up the situation—you didn't hear what the inspector had to say.

"Bertram Goodlake is found dead—shot, sitting at his writing-table in the dusk, and, to judge from the direction of the bullet located by Inspector Drewsbury, by someone who stood just outside the open window. The caretaker, walking down the drive, hears the shot, takes it for a tyre bursting in the high road, thinks nothing of it, returns to the house, and remembers it only when he finds his employer, still seated at the table as he had been when, quite a short time previously, he had brought him some coffee, shot through the head."

"Is that the caretaker's story?" Diana asked.

"Yes—and so far, uncorroborated," I replied. "There is no outside witness to prove the presence of anyone on the premises at that time except Bertram Goodlake and himself. The room, so he alleges, was in disorder, as though a hurried search had been made—you can see that for yourself," I swept an indicating finger round the confusion of papers and furniture, "and he at once went to the constable in the village."

"The man at the gate, I suppose——who let me get in through the hole in the fence without doing any sleuth business," Diana interposed.

"The only clues we have to go on are—footsteps round the house two days ago, heard by the caretaker's wife—a statement also uncorroborated—and the sound of a car coming to a standstill in the lane. A silver cigarette-case, said by Mrs. Dawkins, the caretaker's wife, to have been found in the shrubbery—also unconfirmed—and the bullet located by the inspector in the corner of that bookcase." I pointed to a tall piece of heavy oak furniture facing us, and Diana gave a little shiver.

"There are no finger-prints," I added, "and no footprints outside. The grass is neglected and full of weeds, and the inspector said, beyond being slightly crushed where the murderer may have been standing for some little time waiting his chance, shows no sign of definite impressions."

"There's one thing quite obvious," she said with decision, after a pause.

"And that is——?"

"We've got to find the secretary!"

CHAPTER V

"FIND the secretary? Of course we must find the secretary! It doesn't require a Sherlock Holmes to tell us that," I rejoined with a fine touch of irony. "The point is, how do you propose to set about it?"

Diana regarded me thoughtfully, her hazel eyes looking at and through me in a way they have when she is thinking earnestly. For a moment she was silent.

"Ideas will come. They always do," she said slowly.

"No doubt—but they are sometimes the wrong ones!" I rejoined. "Fortunately, we have Scotland Yard to fall back on. And look here, Diana, that letter has to be shown to the inspector. I am not going to connive at concealing evidence from the police and so possibly defeat the ends of justice."

"My dear Goody," she remonstrated, shaking her head gently, "you did all your conniving when you tore up a valuable piece of evidence and threw it into the waste-paper basket. If I hadn't had sufficient insight to——"

"You called it a hunch when you referred to it before," I interposed.

"I don't care what I called it—but as I retrieved that letter from destruction I consider it mine, by all the laws of——"

"Yes, but Scotland Yard won't," I broke in again, "and the less you attempt to bandy words with Scotland Yard, the better. So," I slipped the letter into my pocket, "I shall hand it over."

Diana drew out her mirror and began to attend to her nose. She went through the entire ritual, ending up with lipstick, and replacing the implements in her bag before speaking again.

"I suggest we have a look round before that plaguey inspector returns," she observed, turning her back on the writing-table, and drifting to the other end of the room. "Then we will go back to the hotel and see what we can make of the letters." She glanced behind her at the corner where grim tragedy still seemed to mouth at us and in spite of herself gave a little shudder.

"Awful!" she murmured, "isn't it? I can't think about it—the poor old man! I hate murderers—my sympathies are all with the murdered! People are silly about murderers nowadays—making excuses for them—and getting sentimental! I hate cowards, too—shooting like that in the dark—from behind. It makes one feel quite shaky!"

She dropped into a chair with a shiver, and I put a reassuring hand on her shoulder; she gave it a little pat and stood up again.

"Don't make me soppy, Goody. I can't think why I should make a fool of myself like this. But I do hate murderers!"

"I don't suppose anyone is particularly fond of them," I said, falling in with her mood, "but we'll try our hardest to catch this one. So buck up! I am sure Inspector Drewsbury will put all he knows

into it. He may be brusque in manner, but I expect he has to deal with some very queer folk at times."

"I daresay," was the careless rejoinder, "but if he imagines I am going on crawling into my own property—what is yours is mine—through a hole in the fence, he will find he is mistaken. My clothes won't stand it," and she glanced ruefully at the rent in her jumper.

I looked about me with some interest. The water-colours, framed and hanging on the walls, no less than the loose sketches littering the floor, which Diana proceeded to pick up and reduce to some sort of order, showed a knowledge of technique and a bold certainty of touch that surprised me. They were set in plain white cardboard mounts with brown paper at the back, those that were unframed.

Bertram Goodlake had been something of an artist, there was no doubt about that! I have always had a natural taste for water-colours myself, and realized now that perhaps it had been in the family. Without any deep knowledge of the art and with no practical ability, I can distinguish good from bad, and recognize a fine bit of work when I see it.

I had not expected to find my cousin's talent so much above the average, and now reproached myself for a want of appreciation in the past. It was with real pleasure we placed sketch after sketch on an easel and discussed its merits; Diana quite as much interested as myself.

I knew, of course, that family gossip had credited him with a certain facility in what we had called

"dabbing about with paints;" but the prophet had come off with the usual portion in his own country, and none of us had ever suspected, so far as had reached my ears, that his facility had amounted to real talent. He had absented himself for so long from residence in England and contact with his relatives that we had known very little of what he did or did not do, and the practice of a lifetime, perhaps, lay behind those bold, telling sweeps of the brush, and the almost dramatic schemes of light and shade.

His taste in the way of subject had been catholic —forest and snowscape, wild coast scenery, or tropical skies and palm trees; but of them all I preferred a small sketch of green lawns and familiar flowers in the corner of an old walled-in garden, with forest trees at the back, that seemed to bring with it a whiff of cherry-pie and petunia and the sun-steeped fragrance of a truly English summer's day.

"We'll have that framed," I said, putting it aside, "and one or two of the others, and hang them up at home. And now, as it's getting on for tea-time, and I have given lunch a miss, let's go back to the hotel. Later on I shall have to go into Paignhamstead to go through the form of identification."

"Red tape, of course—the caretaker must know what your cousin looked like a great deal better than you do after all these years." She gave a final look round, placed the little sketch we meant to have framed on an easel, and led the way to the front door.

"If we had been told this time yesterday that

within four-and-twenty hours you and I would find ourselves staying in a perfectly strange hotel in a part of England we have never been to before—at least I haven't—we—" Diana began impressively, "we wouldn't have believed it," she tailed off weakly, having searched in vain for a more dramatic climax.

"Lots of things happen like that," I said. "You young people are always so astonished when anything unexpected happens. Fate doesn't always enlist the services of an announcer like the B.B.C., and even forgets to cast the shadow before that we are taught we have a right to expect. When you get to my age——"

"Bow-wow," Diana said sweetly with her disarming smile, slipping her hand into the crook of my arm. "I am sure that would have been very impressive in the days of good Queen Victoria, but it isn't cutting any ice just here. We have to lock up the house and give the key to the policeman at the gate—he'll have a fit when he sees me—and then we'll go back to the hotel."

Which we did; the two miles or so of country road lying between High Oaks and the Paignhamstead Arms being well within the capacity of my lame foot. A word from the inspector had apparently discounted the expected fit, as the blue-coated man on guard let Diana pass the gate with no word beyond a curt greeting.

The hotel, I confess, was a pleasant surprise. It was quite a fine building, a bit more ambitious than the usual country town inn, giving the impression of having once been somebody's country house. As it was the height of the summer season, with a

fine golf course within easy distance, it was fairly full of visitors.

A long, low dining-room, criss-crossed with old oak beams, looked out through a row of windows on wide green lawns, with glimpses of flowering shrubs beyond a balustraded terrace that ran the whole length of the frontage. There was a winter garden for bad weather where tall tree ferns and the gleaming leaves of camellias made a background for scattered groups of chairs and tables. From the hall, large and sufficiently well-furnished to serve as an additional smoking- and writing-room, a wide oak staircase, newel posts at every corner, led up into an intricate network of passages and smaller staircases, where the bedrooms lay. There were a few private sitting-rooms upstairs, it seemed, but Diana refused to consider the desirability of securing one. She preferred to see life, as she put it, life even at Paignhamstead being presumably more interesting than none at all.

I feel justified in describing our new quarters at some length, as they were to be the central point of action in the drama of which we were only on the threshold, and a vivid presentment of our surroundings during its enactment may help the reader to visualize more clearly what follows.

Diana led me through a small room, empty for the moment, on to the terrace overlooking the gardens. Beyond the balustrade, in and out of which long trails of cluster-roses entwined themselves, offering us their delicate fragrance in the still air, groups of people were seated at various tables on the lawn, drinking tea.

"Those," she observed, with an air of doing the

honours, and indicating a young couple sitting rather apart from the rest, "are a pair of honeymooners called Verilees. He is a captain in the army and they are going out to India next month. Too interested in themselves to be interesting to anybody else."

"I have known similar cases," I observed, "it is an attitude not entirely confined to honeymooners as a class."

"That elderly man," Diana resumed, "with the square white beard that waggles when he talks, is a Dr. Delmico—you can't see it waggling from here, but I saw it at lunch-time. He is supposed to be very learned—a psychologist or something—and the woman sitting with him is Mrs. Vaughan. She isn't bad—we sat at the same table for lunch—rolls her r's rather attractively, but a bit too fierce with the lipstick—she and the honeymooners arrived yesterday; the girl coming towards the terrace steps is Alpha Lorne—highbrow—written a book that's made quite a success, and I hope I may get a hint or two from her for my detective novel; and those men sitting over in the far corner are golfers—golf all day and probably dream of it all night. Then there are a few frumps and fogies whose names I don't know—and that's all I do know at present."

"How the devil did you get all that information in the time?" I asked.

"Just picked it up," she answered casually, "the way one does. Mrs. Vaughan told me a good bit—and I got a sprinkling from the waiter who belonged to our table. Those people beyond Mrs. Vaughan, by the by, are a Major and Mrs. Forsythe. He was

something in India. They've got a son but he isn't with them now. It's just as well to know who you're rubbing shoulders with. I have taken a table for us permanently in one of the windows and—hullo, what's this ? " she finished, as a page, with business in his eye, approached from the end of the terrace.

" A policeman wants to see *you*, sir," he announced in a carrying voice, bringing all the heads of the nearest group on the lawn facing round in my direction. I could have boxed his young ears for him, though I fancied the meaning conveyed by the accentuation of the word *you* was probably accidental. As a stranger in a strange land, I could have done with a different form of introduction.

" Bring him here," I said shortly ; as my fellow visitors had heard the indictment I was determined they should see the finish.

" You needn't stop—if you like to go and order tea," I observed to Diana. I hated letting her in for this sort of thing. But the limelight has no terrors for the youth of to-day.

" I'm in this," she said shortly and, seating herself on the balustrade, lit a cigarette.

The next moment Inspector Drewsbury was upon us, and as we were out of hearing if we lowered our voices, he began to speak at once.

" True enough about that lunatic," he said in his jerky way, "—but can't make up my mind if he had anything to do with the murder. Wants a bit more looking into. Gave his keeper the slip, it seems—and been roamin' the country—feedin' on berries and roots and hidin' in the woods—kind o'

Robinson Crusoe game—wits enough to give 'em all the slip."

"Have they got him—or is he still at large?" I asked.

"Got him," was the terse reply. "Got a bit too sharp set, and went to a cottage to beg a bit of bread, and was nobbled by the owner and his son. Blood on his clothes—but the scratches and cuts on his arms and hands might account for that. Point is—where would he have got the automatic?" and he shook his head thoughtfully.

"Has it been found?"

"Not a sign of it. My men have gone over the whole place, inside and out—searching all day, and nothing doing. In one of the writing-table drawers we found an automatic, evidently belonging to Mr. Goodlake himself—the magazine full—obviously hadn't been used—tried it for finger-prints, and found none except the owner's—verified them, of course. No gun on the mad chap either—but he may have dropped it outside somewhere. But we did find something on him," he added, "— a bunch of keys—and Mr. Goodlake's keys are missing."

"Who told you they were missing?" I asked quickly.

"No one, sir,—but a gentleman like Mr. Goodlake is bound to have a bunch of keys somewhere. There's the safe, and the drawers of the writing-table—two of 'em had been prised open—rotten little locks they were—and his latch-key and the keys of his suit-cases. The bookcases are locked, and there's a locked cellarette in the dining-room. There had to be a bunch o' keys somewhere. We

haven't tried 'em out yet—I've only just come by them—and there's another bit of verifying to be done first."

He paused, pinched his lower lip meditatively, and went on :

"The mad chap can't say how he came by them—not much good if he could—we wouldn't believe him. Says he picked 'em up. May have. One of the larger keys had a bit of finger-print on it but not enough to go by. But as we know he has had the handling of them it wouldn't tell us much anyway."

"What was the other point requiring verification ? " I asked.

"Well, sir," he began with a slight hesitation, "we haven't followed it up, and don't want it to get about," he threw a glance in Diana's direction for the first time, having carefully ignored her presence so far, "but when the keys were taken from the man there was a strand or two of canvas with a fragment of tobacco entangled in them, twisted up in the wards of one of them—and smoking ain't allowed at the Home he comes from."

"That's why he tried to escape, I expect," Diana remarked, blowing a puff of smoke towards Heaven with an air of great enjoyment, and the shadow of a smile moved the inspector's thin lips.

"Were any cigarettes missing at High Oaks ? You might get a clue there, you know. A man who is more or less a lunatic might easily murder anybody to get cigarettes if he'd been kept off smoking for any time. Also, did he wear gloves ? If no strange finger-prints were found, somebody must have worn gloves."

"He was not wearing gloves when he was caught, but he had a pair in his pocket, it seems, so——" the police officer hesitated.

"So it's even betting whether he had them on or not?" Diana suggested, "and doesn't seem to get us on much farther. Even an *outsider* can see that far." He glanced at her suspiciously. "But what about the tobacco on the bunch of keys?" she finished.

"The tobacco is of a sort not obtainable hereabouts," the inspector continued thoughtfully. "It's what they call 'ship's' tobacco—so the tobacconist in Paignhamstead thinks—there's only one tobacconist's shop of any size—but we'll get expert's opinion."

"Well," I said as he paused, "what about it?"

"Mayn't lead to much," he replied, "but the caretaker Dawkins—he has a nephew in the navy, sir," and added, as though talking to himself, "I'm not altogether satisfied about those Dawkinses."

CHAPTER VI

IT was all very well for Diana in her youthful arrogance to profess contempt for the administrators of British justice, but my own feeling as I watched the shrewd, inscrutable features of the policeman, set in deep concentration on the question in hand, was—Heaven help one once the sleuths of the C.I.D. were on the trail! Inspector Drewsbury might appear for the moment dead to the world about him, his mind far distant, fitting events into their right places; but the curious alertness never faded from his keen blue eyes and, abstracted as he might seem, I doubted if anything taking place around him would escape his notice.

"If we could put our hands on those emeralds," he began doubtfully, and broke off with apparent irrelevance. "I am having the caretaker's cottage and premises searched at this moment."

"A lot of good that will be," Diana remarked suavely; then sitting up suddenly, "—unless there's an old wall on the premises—and even then Dawkins wouldn't know anything about it!" After which cryptic remark she turned sideways and stared across the lawn.

The inspector looked at her helplessly. Diana as a proposition was outside his calculations.

It appeared to be a suitable moment for the production of the letter. I drew the two halves

from my pocket and handed them to the law's representative.

"I received this a year or more ago, and thought nothing of it—tore it in half, as you see. My cousin had a fancy for crossword puzzles, and liked to hide his meaning in cryptic phrases. No doubt he would have called that letter a 'light'. It may be a clue to where the emeralds are hidden; he would have loved to hide them and set us all on the hunt. What he says doesn't seem to take us very far."

The detective perused it in silence, pulling at his under-lip absent-mindedly; the gesture was growing familiar to me.

"This may throw some light on the unfinished letter found under the body," he observed doubtfully, taking a leather note-book from his pocket. "I gave you the letter, sir, but I noted the contents. They didn't seem to amount to much."

I produced the original letter while he read from his notes, and then looked up.

"Except that he seems to want to get his knife into the secretary!— May be worth following up."

"Worth following up?" Diana broke in with some heat. "Of course it is! Why, he as much as tells you his secretary murdered him!"

"A bit too much like a mystery novel for my taste," the inspector retorted. "Things don't happen like that in real life—and in the meantime I'll keep an eye on Dawkins."

He saluted and was gone before I could offer an opinion.

Diana transferred her slim young limbs to a chair, produced her aids to beauty and dabbed at her nose.

"Dawkins!" she snorted—I am sorry to use the term, but no other exactly expresses it—"and 'things don't happen like that'!" She turned from the mirror's shining surface and gazed at me with the same indignant appeal I remembered in the long ago when her golliwog fell into an unpleasant duck-pond, and I was expected to rescue it. It was an irresistible appeal to me, and I moved towards her impulsively.

But the ways of the new generation are unexpected, and her next remark quenched the flame of my protective ardour.

"How the devil does *he* know how things mayn't happen?" she exclaimed. "The whole world isn't cut out on a pattern supplied by Scotland Yard! However—the lunatic and Dawkins between them will keep him nice and busy, and I shall follow up the 'clue' he thinks so little of, and find the emeralds, if I have to pull down every old wall in the place!"

"That I think would be overdoing it," I said dryly.

"It's got to be where the sun makes a pattern on the grass," she added; "that will narrow it down a bit. There was a bit of wall, all grown over, near the hole in the fence I crept through—which may do as a taking-off place."

"Why should he bury the emeralds?" I asked.

"Because he was afraid of the secretary pinching them. He says so—implies it anyway. If that clue about the old wall and the grass doesn't mean the emeralds are hidden there, what does it mean? The inspector can shadow Dawkins if he likes—he probably won't be happy unless he is shadowing

somebody—but I shall look for that old wall! It will be good practice and I can put it in my book."

"How is the book getting on?" I asked by way of taking her mind off the sordid subject of my cousin's death.

"I haven't started it yet. The kick-off is always the hardest part, but I am collecting material and making character studies all the time."

"Well, don't get run in for libel," I remarked, "it will run away with the profits."

"If people choose to make caps fit it's nothing to do with me. I shall certainly put that inspector in it," she retorted.

"That will be quite safe! He wouldn't recognize himself—not as you would paint him," I laughed.

Diana rose suddenly from her perch on the rose-entwined balustrade.

"I know what I'll do!" she exclaimed, her eyes alight. "I'll send for Peter! He will be able to get away easily enough from his secretary stuff, and he'll help me with the book, and be useful when it comes to digging behind old walls!"

"Are you sure he *will* get off so easily?" I asked. "It doesn't sound as if he is of much use in the office!"

"It isn't as if it was a regular office—he only writes letters or something for old Sir Thingamy. Of course he can get off! You don't mind, Goody?" she asked as an after-thought.

"Mind?" I queried. "Of course not—if it pleases you. But if Peter still considers you have spoilt his young life he probably won't come."

"He'll come right enough," was the decisive rejoinder, "he'll love to do a bit of sleuthing—and

it's just on the cards he may have an idea or two," and with this optimistic reflection she made a bee-line for the telephone.

It was surprising how quickly we settled down to life in the hotel. As Diana in her whole-hearted way had taken up my cousin's cause, with a grim determination to see justice done, and I could not bring her to leave it in the hands of authority, it was necessary to remain within reach of the scene of action, and the Paignhamstead Arms appeared to be as convenient and comfortable as anything likely to be found in the neighbourhood.

My sympathies were entirely with her. I flattered myself that I understood Diana as neither her worldly stepmother, Mrs. Michaelson, nor my own somewhat narrow-viewed, inclined-to-be-Victorian sister, Albinia, had ever understood her. When a man is handicapped through life and debarred from the more physically active side of it by a damaged foot, it may possibly be that he becomes more sensitive to the influences working round him, becomes keyed-up, so to speak, to greater susceptibility to psychological conditions. I know man is supposed not to understand woman—but I do understand Diana.

I know her to have a big heart. Whatever the rising generation of to-day—and at one-and-twenty to be "rising" is all they can claim to—may profess, whatever shibboleths and slogans may be theirs, the heart that beats behind it all remains very much the same kind of heart that bound together our parents in the Garden of Eden for better for worse, when they were cast out into an unfamiliar world. Diana might mask the working

of her own soft heart with powder-puff and curious terms of phraseology, but no aspect of injustice or suffering ever failed to reach it, or to win some sort of response. I knew well enough there was more than mere curiosity or desire for excitement lying behind her partisanship ; but although in aim and general principles we might be in accord, we were not entirely so when it came to details.

Diana was convinced that in Bertram Goodlake's secretary we should, as she put it, " hit the bull's eye," and was in favour of concentrating on a search over the whole face of the globe, if necessary, with the aid of the police authorities in every country Bertram Goodlake was known to have visited.

I, on the other hand, with an inside knowledge of his character, which she lacked, was not really convinced that letter of his, received more than a year previously, had been written in good faith. With his oddly-twisted sense of humour and passion for conundrums, the letter may have had no serious foundation, and I was inclined to agree with the inspector when he proposed to seek the murderer nearer home. It was all very well for Diana to say that in Dawkins and the escaped lunatic Scotland Yard had enough to go on with, but when it comes to hunting criminals the humblest member of the C.I.D. is an expert compared with any sort of amateur.

Then, it was by no means proved so far that the lunatic was innocent. We had slipped into that way of referring to him, though for aught we knew to the contrary, he might be no more than slightly mentally deficient. In the case of a crime committed irresponsibly it would be futile to seek for a

motive; even the incentive suggested by Diana, far-fetched as it might sound, the craving for cigarettes, might furnish sufficient stimulus to drive him to the crime. The only point necessary to establish would be opportunity, and except for the fact that if he were guilty he must somehow have got possession of a revolver, opportunity had apparently not been wanting. Any evidence offered by the unfortunate creature himself obviously would be worth nothing.

Then there was Dawkins.

I had gathered by scarcely perceptible inflexions of voice and emphasis this was the line of inquiry most favoured by the police officer. The man's account of finding the body was not wholly satisfactory, and there was only his word for it. His might easily have been the hand that perpetrated the crime, set the stage and called in the village policeman when he was ready. Here was opportunity *plus* motive, for although it appeared that no robbery had been accomplished, interruption of some sort might have intervened to frustrate it—the emeralds were still missing, and it was quite possible that the caretaker might have got wind of their existence. So far as Dawkins was concerned, finger-prints told a negligible tale. Those of the caretaker might, quite legitimately, be found on any and every object in the room—as in fact they had been.

Then again—where did the weapon come from? Its possession by Dawkins would require as much explanation as its acquisition by the lunatic. My cousin had owned one, as we knew; Inspector Drewsbury had found it in one of the writing-table

drawers that had been broken open; but it had quite obviously not been used—the magazine was full, the weapon pushed far into the drawer, ready perhaps to be used in self-defence should an assailant,—possibly expected—turn up.

There were no finger-prints found on it, except those of my Cousin Bertram, and the inspector himself had pronounced it out of court as the means to the murder.

There was a furtive look about Dawkins I didn't like myself, but that may have been partly imagination. His wife might easily have trumped up the story of footsteps in the shrubbery outside the pantry window to suggest the introduction of an outsider as suspect, and divert attention from her husband. Certainly there was the cigarette-case as ocular evidence, but that might have been picked up anywhere; there was only her statement that she had found it on the pathway running between the back door and the front gate. The inspector's men had reported no trace of footsteps on the path, except the heavy imprint of a hobnailed boot, which had proved to be Dawkins's own; but the weather had been dry and the path overgrown with grass and weeds, so the absence of footmarks proved nothing one way or the other.

That was the position of affairs at the time we took up life at the hotel, and if I had fostered any lurking hope that we should be allowed to mind our own business and be free from prying eyes and ears, I was rapidly undeceived.

The entire countryside appeared to be buzzing with conjectures and suggestions. Half the hotel visitors, with Diana's new friend, Mrs. Vaughan, at

their head, were in favour of the escaped lunatic as the guilty party ; the other half, led by Dr. Delmico, were convinced we need search no farther than the caretaker, Dawkins. So far, the letters left by my dead cousin had not become public property ; but that was not likely to last long, and I found myself, much against my will, the central point in a nine days' wonder.

Diana seemed quite undisturbed—which rather annoyed me.

"Limelight, my child," I remarked the second evening at dinner, "is as vitally necessary to your generation as ozone was to a previous one. They took it in the shape of three weeks at the seaside once a year. Personally, it doesn't agree with me—I mean the limelight—especially this particular brand of it."

"You can't expect to hide a murder under a bushel," she rejoined, with a fine disregard for mixed metaphors. "If you did you'd never find out who did it. The more the subject is aired the better; in my opinion, you are the more likely to pick up clues. Mrs. Vaughan thinks it's the lunatic," she went on, helping herself to a salted almond—an unusually generous addition to the menu for a hotel—"and Dr. Delmico banks on Dawkins. He seems rather a shrewd old bird—Dr. Delmico, I mean,—and as I have already mentioned, a bit of a psychologist. He says Dawkins squints, but from what I hear of Mrs. Dawkins, the man who was married to her might be excused for squinting or anything else—and anyway you can't hang a man on a squint."

This hardly seemed to ask for comment.

"I am very much obliged to all these people for so kindly busying themselves over my affairs," I remarked caustically. "Fortunately, High Oaks is still under police surveillance, so they will not be able to roam about collecting what I believe are called 'souvenirs'!"

"If you imagine Dr. Delmico, and Major and Mrs. Forsythe, and Mrs. Vaughan, and the hotel manager—who is quite a nice man and very interested in the murder, his name is Burgeon—and even the honeymoon couple, who are far too busy collecting souvenirs of each other to think of anything else, are the sort of people who would chip bits off the furniture and scratch their initials on the walls, you are quite mistaken!" Diana rejoined warmly. "I never met a set of people more anxious to help if they can, or more sympathetic!"

I disposed of a bit of lettuce from my salad plate before replying.

"You appear to have made their acquaintance pretty quickly. I don't think much of your Dr. Delmico——"

"He wouldn't be so bad if his beard didn't waggle," she interposed.

"And Mrs. Vaughan's nose is too long. I like a short, straight nose——"

"We can't all have short, straight noses, and it's much more important to have your head screwed on the right way," she broke in again.

"The honeymoon couple are the only decent ones of the lot," I continued, "they mind their own business."

"It's the sort of business that doesn't interest anybody else," she retorted, "as it happens——"

she broke off abruptly, and I glanced across the table—to see her eyes fixed in an astonished stare at the door.

"Albinia!" she muttered, "by all that's poisonous! What for the love of Mike does she want to come here for?"

And Albinia it was—staring round the room till her gaze fell on us; whereupon, with a nod to the manager, who had apparently piloted her, she picked her way among the many tables and joined us with a curt greeting.

CHAPTER VII

AT a gesture from me the waiter brought another chair, and Albinia sat down.

"What an extraordinary coincidence!" Diana remarked. "Of course we are delighted to see you, Albinia, but what on earth has brought you to the Paignhamstead Arms?" and very deliberately she produced powder and lipstick, which she proceeded to manipulate intently with the aid of the small mirror.

To the outsider this manœuvre might have meant nothing. To me it was, in a way of speaking, a clearing of the decks for action; it was also playing red rag to Albinia's bull. In her opinion, any interference with a work of nature was a direct reflection on the Deity. I murmured a remonstrance in the interests of peace.

"You powdered your nose after the soup, Diana dear. It can't want rubbing up again so soon!"

"I can't imagine why the young generation think so much about their noses," Albinia remarked, and added without regard to grammar: "What is the coincidence about me coming to this hotel?"

"That we all should be here—at this perfectly strange hotel, at the same time," Diana replied, replacing her tools and sticking a fork into the meringue on her plate. "Humphrey and I have come on business, of course."

"And why shouldn't I also have come on business?" the other rejoined. "Bertram Goodlake was my cousin just as much as he was Humphrey's—of my own blood, in fact. You seem to forget that, Diana."

"Not at all," Diana replied, finishing the last crumb of her meringue and pushing her chair back, "—if you think you can be of any use here. You'll find me on the terrace, Humphrey—we'll have coffee there," and threading her way through the tables, she disappeared.

I confess I was none too pleased myself at Albinia's advent. For some reason, inscrutable to the male mind, my sister and Diana had never got on together—not really well. Albinia, who was a year or two my senior, was a bit old-fashioned in her opinions, didn't see eye to eye with the new generation; looked coldly at shingled heads, knees that were a bit too adventurous, cocktails and so on. And Diana couldn't resist the temptation to—putting it colloquially—pull her leg.

Anything that did not fall in with Albinia's views on life she considered a misfit, comfortable in an assurance that when it came to brass tacks on the Day of Judgment, Providence would agree with her.

The consequence was I sometimes found myself in the invidious position of either having to decide between them, or having to engineer a discreet disappearance at the psychological moment. Albinia didn't like having her leg pulled; to appreciate the process entails a specially developed sense of humour, and my sister had none.

"It's very nice of you and all that," I began as she settled down to the soup, "but I don't quite

know what you can do about this business. It is in the hands of the police and one can only look on and await developments."

"I don't see Diana looking on and awaiting developments," my sister returned, "and as I am a blood relation of poor Bertram's, it's no more than my duty to show an interest in his violent death."

As Albinia had hitherto ignored a member of the family who she declared to be without morals or patriotism, this sudden awakening of a sense of duty did not arouse in me the respect it ought.

"Although," she finished," it was only to be expected."

"What makes you say that?" I asked quickly, wondering if she too had heard about the secretary.

"No man who led the dissolute life Bertram Goodlake led, could expect to die comfortably in his bed!"

"Lots of dissolute men die in their beds," I pointed out. "There seems no particular reason why Providence should have singled out Bertram to make an example of. Also, there are no grounds for supposing he *was* dissolute—whatever you mean by that," I added.

"You know quite well what I mean by dissolute —a cutlet and spinach," she said to the inquiring waiter all in a breath—"but of course you men stick up for one another."

"So far as I know he devoted his life to cross-word puzzles and sketching in water-colours. Nothing particularly dissolute in that, so far as I can see."

"You can make anything dissolute if you put your mind to it," was the retort.

"I bow to your superior knowledge," I replied dryly; but the sarcasm was wasted, "and anyway," I added, "it's a bit rough to make accusations against a dead man."

"That's all very well," Albinia said truculently, "but if you don't wait till they are dead they have you up for libel," and as there seemed to be no reply to this I let it pass.

I ministered to her comfort and entertainment through every item of a fairly extensive menu, and then adjourned to the terrace.

The dusk was falling, the light fading in the sky behind the high bank of trees that stood at the foot of the lawns. Faint emerald greens merged into pearl greys, and the intermittent blink of an insistent star just above the tree-tops heralded a brilliantly bespangled firmament in the immediate future. A nightingale trilled from somewhere among the trees—faintly, with a gentle insistence that pleaded for a hearing, and a bank of geraniums gleamed like tongues of scarlet flame from the further edge of the lawn.

And this dusk, so beautiful in its soft mystery and the purple glory of its shadows, just four-and-twenty hours previously had veiled as dastardly and despicable a crime as the mind of man could imagine—an old man struck down without a chance to defend himself, without, so far as one could surmise, a single redeeming point in the sordidness of its motive.

Albinia had elected to go straight to her room. I explained her arrival on the scene at some length to Diana, as a quite natural gesture of sympathetic interest in a family tragedy—our nearest relation—

of our own blood—up to us to bring the murderer to justice and so on—a personal vendetta—while I have no doubt—although she said nothing—she privately decided that curiosity and a desire for excitement would have covered the ground.

However, it was Albinia's business; she had a perfect right to take up her quarters at the Paighamstead Arms if she chose, and I only hoped that in a common interest she and Diana might forget the diversity of their outlook, and live in peaceful accord.

If I had hoped to drink my coffee quietly with my wife in a secluded corner of the terrace, a glance along its length undeceived me.

Diana, smoking a cigarette, in a long wicker chair, was the centre of an animated group, all of whom appeared to be talking at once.

I ordered coffee, lit a cigar, and joined them. With a wave of the hand Diana introduced me, and I became entitled to add to the list of my acquaintances the names of Major Forsythe, his wife, Dr. Delmico, Mrs. Vaughan, a young man whose name I failed to catch, and Captain and Mrs. Verilees, described by Diana as "the honeymoon couple", sitting rather apart from the rest, but apparently equally intent on getting the latest news of the local excitement. In the dusk it was difficult to get more than a general impression of each member of the group, but I was able to confirm Diana's statement that Dr. Delmico's beard did waggle when he talked, and that Mrs. Vaughan's nose was too long—only my own opinion, of course, and she was certainly a good-looking woman.

Of Major and Mrs. Forsythe there seems little to

say. He was a usual type of retired military man—pleasant, well-mannered, travelled, grey-moustached; and she—well, she was his wife and that was all there was to it—the sort of nice, good-natured, kindly-featured face, quite attractive and agreeable to talk to, but that you never know again when you see it.

Why Diana should have taken upon herself to introduce me to them I failed to understand. I am quite sure nobody had introduced *her*—unless it was the waiter at lunch, and in my young days a waiter's introduction didn't cut much ice. Modern youth appears to pick each other up anyhow, with a result on occasion, to judge by what the papers tell us, that seems to justify the chaperonage of an earlier period.

But they all appeared to be getting on very well, with a common point of interest for discussion, and although there was a polite pause in the conversation as I joined them, in deference, I presume, to its being *my* business in which they were showing so much interest, rather than their own, a chorus of voices was raised almost immediately, asking for the latest news of the situation.

But apparently they knew as much as I did—or nearly so; in some directions, more! Facts, through much discussion and speculation, had become encrusted with a film of pure conjecture, so added to and reinforced by exaggeration, that the substratum of truth was almost lost sight of, and possibly the murderer himself might have been startled at the results arrived at.

Dr. Delmico who, with the weight of his professorship behind him, commanded some attention when

he talked, asked me if it was a fact that the revolver had been found hidden behind the dresser in Dawkins's cottage, and whether there was a warrant out for his arrest. Before I could deal with this conjecture, Major Forsythe suggested sufficient attention had not been paid to the footsteps heard by the caretaker's wife outside the pantry window, and Mrs. Vaughan murmured that with a lunatic at large she didn't see the use of looking farther and trying to fasten the blame on probably innocent people.

Diana sat cryptically silent. I admired her for it. She had evidently not given away the discovery of the keys nor the contents of the letters I had received; which really pointed to an unusual power of self-restraint. She had only to hint at the contents of the letters to divert the hue and cry into an entirely new channel, with the mythical and elusive secretary as quarry.

I looked across the group at her and smiled.

"Please remember," I observed, addressing no one in particular, "that it is early days to be forming an opinion of any sort. There is certainly not enough evidence yet to justify anybody's arrest. We may have to go much farther afield for a solution of this crime. A man doesn't perambulate the globe as my cousin did without meeting all sorts and conditions of men, and making enemies."

Major Forsythe nodded.

"That's true, especially if he has been in the East. He may make enemies without knowing it—pinching things out of temples and so on. Is there any truth in some talk about emeralds —missing jewels or something? You must forgive

me," he went on, waving his cigar deprecatingly in my direction, "if I am intruding into matters that don't concern me, but," here the cigar was waved inclusively round the circle, "we are all interested in this deplorable tragedy, happening as it has in the midst of us, and publicity is the inevitable accompaniment to such an incident. I know I am speaking for everyone present when I say that if there is anything we can do towards solving the mystery, or to serve you in any way, you have only to mention it."

It was spoken in so friendly a spirit, devoid of all hint of officiousness or vulgar curiosity, that I could but accept it as it was meant. Not that anyone was likely to be able to do anything—I smiled as I pictured Inspector Drewsbury's face confronted by this willing army of amateurs !—but the intention was friendly, and I thanked them.

Dr. Delmico seemed to have divined my thoughts.

"The police look down on amateurs," he remarked sapiently ; I noticed, in spite of his name, he spoke without a foreign accent, "but there have been occasions when the amateur has proved to be not quite the fool they think him."

"I rather believe in the amateur," Mrs. Vaughan said ; "they are often more open-minded than the regular police, and bring a fresh point of view to bear on the subject, and a wider knowledge of the world." She spoke in an even voice with the calm assurance of one who understands life, and she interested me in spite of myself. She was undoubtedly a good-looking woman ; fair hair, grey eyes and a skin that reminded one of magnolia blossoms. I am not of a poetical turn of mind, but

the colour and texture of it actually did suggest those flowers. Her nose was, as I have already said, too long, especially in profile, and her lips certainly owed their vivid scarlet to lipstick, not nature; but one has had to get used to that nowadays.

"Then," she added, "the police are generally so busy untying knots in red tape, that the criminal gets off."

Good-looking or not, she was not to be allowed to criticize adversely a body of men for whom I have the greatest respect.

"There's nothing the matter with the police," I observed coldly. "There's no finer body of men in the world than the British police." Trite possibly, but one can't say it too often of the men who are the bulwarks of our peace as citizens. "I am quite willing to leave my affairs in their hands." A sentiment endorsed by Major Forsythe —although he excepted the Indian police force, in which he had held an appointment after he had left the army—and shortly afterwards the party broke up.

During the following three or four days nothing very stirring took place. The inspector had been recalled to head-quarters for the moment. The most rigorous search had failed to locate the pistol, and the patient from the mental home made so many contradictory statements in apparently good faith that he had been given up as a bad job.

Albinia, who had insisted on knowing all there was to be known, had established herself at our table, and there appeared to be every prospect that in a very short time she would have everyone by the ears.

That, briefly, was the state of affairs a few days after our arrival, and it was at this point that things really began to move.

It all started because Diana dropped the marmalade spoon at breakfast.

A marmalade spoon can be the most malignant thing in the world. Somebody wrote a treatise once—or was going to and didn't,—on the malignancy of inanimate things. There is no doubt about their malignancy, the question is, are they always really as inanimate as they make out ?

Diana dropped the spoon on the table-cloth, and I, throwing my hand out—too late—to catch it, knocked it off the table on to the floor, and then quite inadvertently Diana kicked it under the table. That, of course, meant that the table-cloth, my hand, as well as the toe of Diana's grey *suède* shoe had marmalade on them, not to mention the carpet. I then wiped my fingers on my napkin, and impulsively flicked a tiresome fly off my cheek with it, so I had marmalade on my face as well. With a start like that, in about a minute and a half there wasn't a thing on the table that wasn't sticky.

I defy anyone to be sticky and good-tempered at the same time ! It's something to do with the nerves and quite beyond one's control. When I thought I had successfully got rid of it from my fingers, I found the spoon had cannoned off my knee on its way to the floor. That was the last straw, and telling the waiter to keep my coffee hot, I went off in search of towels and hot water to get rid of the stuff effectually.

As I left the dining-room I saw a young man—quite decent-looking, clean-shaven, apparently a

new arrival that morning—rise from the table next our own, and with a word to Diana go down on his knees to pick up the spoon from under the table—and I wished him joy of the job.

I got the hot water, washed my hands, sponged the sticky trail from knee and coat-sleeve, and returned to the dining-room—by one door, just in time to see Diana and the young man leaving by another, talking pleasantly and lighting their cigarettes from the same match.

CHAPTER VIII

GREAT results arise from small causes. Trite that, and possibly banal; but that would equally apply to many truths. In this case the original cause was the marmalade spoon, but I am inclined to think the result that followed would have been the same in any case. If the marmalade spoon had not been there, some other peg would have served upon which to hang the result.

As the door closed on Diana and her companion I suppose I smiled—to judge by the remark with which Albinia greeted me; but the smile was probably caused by the expression of blank astonishment on my sister's face as I rejoined her at the table.

"What there is to smile at I fail to see!" was the remark she fired at me. "In my young days"—how fortunate Diana was not there to hear!—"if I had gone off like that with a young man without any sort of introduction——" she hesitated for a suitable climax, and failed to find it.

"He picked up the marmalade spoon," I replied, finishing my coffee which, in spite of the waiter's efforts, was nearly cold, "that is sufficient introduction for anyone nowadays."

She looked at me suspiciously. I have said—Albinia has no sense of humour.

"It was very kind of him to do it," I added.

"I didn't—nothing would have induced me to touch the thing again."

"It was the waiter's business," Albinia retorted.

"Possibly the waiter didn't want a chance to introduce himself," I observed casually, rising from my chair, and my sister shot another covert glance —as they say in books—in my direction.

"I wonder you don't stop it, Humphrey," she said shortly.

"You wouldn't—if you knew Diana and her generation as well as I do," I rejoined. "And you'd have done just the same, Albinia, in your salad days if you'd had the chance—but you hadn't, your parents saw to that. That's the only difference."

I left this for my sister's digestion. She looked rather pleased than otherwise. The woman isn't born yet who isn't flattered by being considered at heart a rake.

I strolled into the hall in search of a morning paper; picked up *The Times* and went on to the terrace where a July sun was casting sharp shadows across the grey stones of the balustrade.

Diana and her new friend were sitting together on the lawn under the shade of a cedar tree, smoking cigarettes; she was talking very earnestly, and he listening as though all creation depended on what she was saying. That is the way to attract Diana; she likes to be taken seriously, and the hero of the marmalade spoon had evidently found it out. He looked presentable enough, and anyway I wasn't worrying.

So I settled down in a shady corner and started on *The Times*—only to be pounced on by the man

with the waggling beard who appeared to have been biding his time like a spider, he so gave one the impression of having appeared from nowhere.

"Do you believe in dreams?" he asked abruptly, sinking into a chair beside me, and dropping a shower of cigarette ash down the front of his waistcoat. As I had just begun a leader on the probable political situation in six months' time, the question caught me like a cold douche.

"Whose dreams?" I queried discouragingly.

"Anybody's dreams—everybody's dreams! What do you mean by 'whose dreams'?" he replied impatiently.

"I shouldn't believe in everybody's account of their dreams. There are lots of people in the world I wouldn't believe on their oath about anything. I know people do dream—I do it myself; if that's what you mean."

"You don't realize their importance, I can see that," he went on. "Now if I could find out what that man Dawkins dreams about——"

"Really, sir," I interrupted, "I take no interest in what Dawkins dreams about—and I am rather anxious to read the news." I hoped he might take the hint, broad enough in all conscience, but he continued:

"I am only suggesting a means of helping the police to locate the murderer."

"Why not suggest it directly to them?" I asked. "It's almost waste of time to talk to me about it, but Scotland Yard is always ready to listen. Inspector Drewsbury's opinion on dreams ought to be interesting." I put the newspaper up between

us with an air of finality that could hardly be mistaken.

The hint this time was taken, and with a dissatisfied " h'mph ! " the professor, as I believed him to be, walked away along the terrace. I followed him with my eyes over the top of the paper, wondering if he really was a professor. He seemed almost too big a fool to be true !

Half an hour had hardly slipped by before I was told Inspector Drewsbury wanted to see me. As there was no one else on the terrace at the moment, I had him shown straight out. I threw the paper aside and rose from my chair to meet him.

He declined a cigar and we fell into step along the wide, gravelled walk. He had returned from London overnight and his news was mostly of the negative sort.

" Dawkins has explained the key business," he began, " —how the bit of ship's tobacco got hung up in the bunch of keys. Whether you like to believe it or not is another matter."

I glanced at the keen features beside me. From a slightly sardonic smile I gathered that the inspector himself had found the story rather hard to swallow.

" He says Mr. Goodlake handed the keys over to him the afternoon of his death, telling him to open a locked cupboard in the hall and give a couple of fur rugs that were in it a good brushing and airing. Dawkins thinks he meant to go off travelling again in some cold country and take the rugs with him. He slipped the keys into his pocket and went home to get his tea. He said he has a nephew in the navy—which we knew already "—the inspector interposed—" who sometimes gives him what he

called 'a fid of ship's baccy', which, as you may know, sir, has a wrapping of canvas to it, and it would have been easy enough for a scrap of it left in the pocket to get picked up with the keys."

The story seemed plausible enough so far, and I said so.

"Just so," he acquiesced, "but when you look into it, several interesting points present themselves. You must remember the keys were found in possession of the lunatic man—not Dawkins."

We turned at the end of the terrace and slowly retraced our steps.

"Dawkins explains that by stating, that somewhere on the return journey from his cottage he must have dropped them, for when he arrived at High Oaks they were no longer in his pocket. He retraced his steps, searching every foot of the ground he had covered, without result—concluded he had dropped them under his own roof, but—so I gathered," the inspector's features relaxed in a smile, "didn't dare brave Mrs. Dawkins's wrath at his carelessness, and put off further investigation till he returned in the evening. Then the finding of Mr. Goodlake's dead body in the library put the keys out of his mind. Now, he feels sure the 'loony chap,' as he calls him, must have picked them up and slipped them into his own pocket."

"That," he went on, after a slight pause, "opens up one or two questions. Taking for granted for the moment Dawkins is guilty, if he had the keys in his possession why should he break open the drawers in the writing-table and make a futile and ineffectual attempt on the safe? He had nothing to do but fit the keys in the respective locks and turn them.

No common sense in breaking them open ! Again—if Mr. Goodlake had anything valuable locked in the library, either in the drawers or safe, is it likely he would have given Dawkins the run of the place by handing over the keys to him ? Dawkins *may* be honest enough—don't say he isn't ; but he doesn't look it—isn't the sort of man to inspire confidence at a glance, and Mr. Goodlake with his infrequent visits to the place couldn't have known much about him."

" You don't believe his story then ? "

He pursed his lips with a half-shrug of the shoulder.

" I am only putting the facts before you, sir, and the conclusion I draw is this—that if the story is true and Mr. Goodlake gave Dawkins those keys, then there was nothing of any value—neither emeralds nor anything else—in the house. I opened the safe last night, and it was empty—except for a few receipts, an unimportant letter or two and an old account book. The emeralds may have been there—and been pinched by Dawkins or somebody else—from one of the broken open drawers, not the safe ; but if so, it was the act of a madman on Mr. Goodlake's part to let the keys go out of his possession for one moment ! "

" Certainly the caretaker's story seems a bit thin ! " I hazarded.

" So thin that it might be true ; there is evidence for and against it," he rejoined. " The least likely turns out to be true just as often as the apparently obvious proves to be wrong. We mustn't forget that. Who is that—the man, I mean ? " he asked slowly, nodding at Diana's companion, whose back

was presented to us as we paced towards them along the terrace. "I don't get his face from here."

The question was shot at me so suddenly it took me aback. I was forced to admit that I didn't know.

The inspector looked at me in some surprise.

"But he is talking to Mrs. Goodlake?" he suggested.

"Lots of people talk to Mrs. Goodlake that I don't know," I rejoined cheerfully. "This is an independent generation—or thinks it is! The young man arrived last night, I believe, and this morning he introduced himself to my wife through the agency of a marmalade spoon. I have no doubt I shall be presented to him later on."

My companion smiled, remarking rather absently: "That's all right," and transferred his attention from the pair under the cedar tree to myself.

"I saw he was a new arrival," he remarked, "his name is Farjohn—you'll find him on the hotel register. And now, sir——"

"One moment, Inspector, before you go," I interposed, "you say you don't believe the emeralds were ever inside High Oaks. Do you remember the letter I received about a year ago? I gave it to you—torn in half—giving what my cousin called 'a clue'—something about an old wall and sunshine on the grass. I don't remember the exact words. What can that refer to except the emeralds? —that he had hidden them somewhere outside the house, not inside?"

I did not add that Diana was so convinced of the truth of this hypothesis that she intended to con-

duct her own investigations on the spot. The less he knew about Diana's movements the better.

"Why should he have hidden them?" the inspector asked, drawing his brows together.

"Heaven knows! We had better find them first and look for reasons afterwards. There's another thing—what about the secretary? I think that clue ought to be followed up, I believe there is something in it. My cousin would not have said so definitely 'find the secretary and you will have found the murderer'—for that is what it amounted to—without good reason."

The police officer looked at me doubtfully.

"Rather like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay," he said slowly. "But we shall not neglect that line." It seemed to me he was treating it rather off-handedly and I may have shown it, for he added: "Any information you can furnish of Mr. Goodlake's habits and the places he has visited during the last few years will be of service."

He glanced at the couple still talking under the cedar, and seemed to be on the point of saying something, turned to me, in fact, his lips parted to speak; thought better of it, and putting a hand to his hat, abruptly disappeared round the corner of the house.

I wondered what he had been going to say and then, why he didn't say it; but Diana, just alive to his presence, had risen hurriedly and, followed by the man Farjohn, arrived at the terrace steps as the police officer vanished round the corner, and put a sudden stop to my speculations.

"Any news from Scotland Yard?—and this is Mr. Farjohn," she said all in a breath, indicating

the young man in her wake with a wave of the hand. "He is tremendously interested in crime and detection and all that sort of thing, and," she added, lowering her voice and looking at me earnestly, "I think he may be a lot of use to us."

We exchanged nods. He was not a bad-looking chap, young and tallish, dark hair brushed sleekly off his forehead, dark eyes, a lean face and a square, clean-shaven chin. Very good teeth, visible when he smiled. Nothing to go off the deep end about, but Diana seemed pleased enough with his company and, rather to my amazement, as he threw away the end of his cigarette, and with a muttered word or two to her, turned to go into the house, she called after him:

"Tea on the lawn at 4.30, and I'll tell you if there's been anything doing."

"My dear Diana," I remarked, "you seem to have been getting on pretty quickly!"

"You have got to get on quickly if you want to get anywhere nowadays," she rejoined, and as a faint amusement dawned in her eyes, I followed the direction of them, and saw Albinia cannon into Farjohn rather violently as he stepped over the threshold of the long window into the house.

He drew back with an apology, and my sister stepped out on to the terrace, glanced at his face as he passed, and stared after him as he walked through the window and out of sight.

Then she turned and came slowly towards us. She seemed to be worried.

"Your friend of the marmalade spoon, isn't he?" she asked Diana, who nodded.

Albinia's mind, if her eyes were index to it, was

searching in wide spaces as though hunting some memory that escaped her like a will o' the wisp. Diana noticed it too ; she kept her own eyes on her.

" Where have I seen that young man before ? " Albinia murmured.

" Under the table at breakfast this morning," Diana replied promptly.

My sister paid no attention. The expression in her eyes was changing.

" Albinia—you've got it ! " Diana exclaimed. " You've got a hunch ! "

" I haven't ! " Albinia said indignantly, and added : " What is a hunch ? "

" If you don't know what it is, how do you know you haven't got it ? I can see you have caught that elusive little bird, and there's nothing more to do but to put salt on its tail ! What is it ? " she asked curiously.

" It's a pity you can't take life a little more seriously, Diana," Albinia replied. " When I was a girl, I was taught to believe a woman's highest ambition should be to be a companion to her husband ; not a mere plaything to amuse his leisure hours."

" I am sure you are right—and I can't see you amusing anybody's leisure hours, Albinia," was the grave reply. " No one would do you such an injustice. There's nothing about you to suggest the plaything. But what is it you have suddenly remembered ? "

I welcomed the diversion. Fireworks are all very well in their place, but one doesn't want to live with them.

Albinia repeated slowly : " I have seen that young

man before!" And this time there was a complacent triumph in her voice that set even me wondering.

But she said no more, and when Albinia had once made up her mind, even the faith that can remove mountains would not induce her to change it.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER a perfunctory inquest, which was adjourned on the usual plea of insufficient evidence to justify a verdict, the remains of Bertram Goodlake were buried in the Paignhamstead parish cemetery as quietly as possible. He had made no friends in the neighbourhood, nor even acquaintances, owing to his hermit-like habits when visiting his native soil ; but the appetite for the sensational and morbid was apparently as widespread as ever, for everyone in the county with nothing better to do was at the grave-side that morning.

I was moved, in a fashion, in spite of myself, in spite, that is to say, of the entire absence of affection, in the true meaning of the word, between myself and the dead man. The crowd, too, stirred me to a mild indignation, knowing as I did their presence there indicated neither regret nor respect, but a crude curiosity and a morbid desire to be associated in ever so trifling a manner with a tragedy that at the moment was furnishing headlines in the daily papers. Had Bertram Goodlake died in their midst of neglect and starvation, the fact would have failed to create any excitement or public interest ; his death was nothing to anyone ; it was the manner of it that filled the cemetery with staring, inquisitive idlers.

There were, of course, a few exceptions. The

Mayor of Paignhamstead and a few neighbouring landowners were present at the grave-side more as a compliment to myself than for any other reason. And indeed for any absence of sympathetic regret on the part of the neighbourhood my cousin had only himself to thank, for during his infrequent visits to High Oaks he had shown no desire to cultivate the acquaintance of those around him. Even in the manner of the officiating priest there was a note of aloofness, a noticeable absence of emotion. His address was delivered perfunctorily, and dealt with the horror of crime in the abstract rather than references to the deceased. I was glad when the dismal little ceremony came to an end and I was free to return to Diana at the hotel.

Having failed to discover anything of importance at High Oaks beyond the obvious evidence of the circumstances of the crime, the police had so far modified their surveillance of the place as to allow us the free run of it. A communication from my cousin's firm of lawyers had stabilized my claims to the property, and dispelled any doubts Inspector Drewsbury may have held as to my rights of ownership. The will was in my favour, appointing me heir and sole executor. This had considerably eased the situation, and Diana and I found ourselves able to come and go as we pleased.

For my own part I was in favour of leaving the investigation in the hands of the police. In some respects we had no choice, for when it came to instituting an organized search over half the inhabited globe for Bertram Goodlake's secretary—who might even have been a figment of his own

impish brain—no one outside the regular police force would be qualified to do so.

But Diana declared that when it came to the emeralds it was another matter. It might be well worth while to search for the emeralds "at the back of an old wall," according to the wording of the letter, although we shouldn't be likely to find the secretary there! And that while the police were barking up one tree she was going to do a bit of barking on her own up another. I am quoting her own words, specially chosen for the benefit of Albinia, who professed ostentatiously to be unable to understand the language.

"Do as you like about it," I said, "but the inspector seems to think the letter doesn't amount to much."

"He wouldn't!" was the scornful rejoinder. "He is concentrating on Dawkins, and if he fails he will fall back on the lunatic. A lunatic is a very convenient back door. It may be difficult to prove he did the deed, but it's equally difficult to prove he didn't! Also," she added, "I have sent for Peter to come and give us a hand. He can trump up some excuse and get away."

Albinia pricked up her ears. I am sorry to describe my sister's attitude in these words, but none other will do.

"Who is Peter?" she asked abruptly, bringing the light of battle into Diana's hazel eyes.

"A man I was as nearly married to as didn't matter," she replied casually, "one of them, I should say."

"One of who?" Albinia asked sharply.

"Of the men I didn't marry," Diana answered,

producing mirror and powder-puff. "There were quite a lot of them."

Albinia looked puzzled.

"Quite a lot of who?" she asked.

"Of the men I didn't marry," Diana replied patiently.

"As you could not marry more than one man, I suppose there were," my sister objected.

"That's what I'm saying," Diana observed.

Albinia gave her shoulders a little shake.

"I can't think what you mean!" she complained, "and anyway, you haven't told me who Peter is?"

"Humphrey thought I was going to marry him, too, so you can imagine what a near thing it was," Diana went on. "I don't know that I can tell you more about him than that. Peter is just a young man—in an office—doing secretary to someone. His other name is Lanham, if that's any help," she added.

Albinia looked at her helplessly, her rampant curiosity too actively aroused to let the matter drop.

"If he's working in an office, how can he come to Paignhamstead?" she asked.

"He'll probably say he wants to attend his grandmother's funeral."

"Is his grandmother dead?" Albinia asked, raising her eyebrows.

Diana returned her inquisitive gaze gravely.

"One of them is pretty nearly sure to be," she said.

"One of what?"

"Of his grandmothers. Young men in offices always have several."

Albinia turned to me.

"Can't you say anything, Humphrey?" she asked impatiently. "Why has Diana invited this young man to come here?"

We were at tea on the lawn, which for the moment we had pretty well to ourselves. The Forsythes had gone into Paignhamstead; the honeymoon couple had vanished with the completeness common to honeymoon couples; most of the men were on the golf course three miles away, and the only other occupant of the lawn besides ourselves was the "highbrow" young lady, who was seated in the shade of a copper beech tree at the edge of the wood reading a book.

"Why shouldn't Diana invite Peter Lanham here if she likes?" I asked, folding a piece of thin bread and butter in half. "I don't suppose he will be of any help, but he's a good enough chap in his way, and he'll do no harm."

"If he is going to his grandmother's funeral, as Diana says——" Albinia began.

At this point, I regret to say, Diana spluttered over her tea and had a bad choking fit.

"I didn't say he was going to his grandmother's funeral," Diana said when she could speak. "I said he *might* be going to it."

"Is she dead?" Albinia persisted.

"Is who dead?" Diana's voice still shook a little.

"His grandmother," Albinia snapped.

"If she isn't, he couldn't be going to her funeral—could he?" Diana replied blandly.

Albinia looked annoyed.

"Humphrey——" she began.

"I refuse to be referee—if that's what you are

going to suggest," I said hastily, rising to my feet. "I don't suppose Peter Lanham will be much practical use——"

"He will help me with my book," Diana murmured.

"——but he and Farjohn can give you a hand when it comes to the digging!" I finished, and walked off to the house in search of an evening paper.

I did not for a moment imagine anything would be gained by amateur investigations on the spot; if the letter did hold a clue, the police were far more capable of dealing with it than ourselves. But Diana fancied her instincts as a sleuth, and if it pleased her to conduct a treasure hunt it could hurt no one.

Had I foreseen what was to come of it I should not have treated it so lightly.

For the following days I was busy with the lawyers and legal business entailed by my succession to the property. There were papers to sign—some of which would have affected no one's welfare, whether signed or not, except the lawyers'; arrangements to be made with regard to some trifling legacies my cousin had left to dependents, including a small sum to an artist in Monte Carlo with whom he had apparently had dealings. Some of my own ordinary business and correspondence had to be attended to also.

So I stayed in London at my house in South Hans Square for the inside of the week that I found it necessary to remain within reach of Lincoln's Inn, and returned to Paignhamstead in the car, foreseeing the frequent journeys between the hotel

and High Oaks that would be expected of me in the immediate future were likely to become wearisome on two feet, one of which was not all it might be.

I arrived just in time for dinner, changed hastily and joined Diana and my sister at our table in the window.

Diana was evidently burning to communicate her news.

"Wait," I admonished, "we will have coffee on the terrace. Waiters have ears no less than walls, and you don't want everything proclaimed throughout the village—not to mention the town of Paignhamstead."

"Now," she began as we settled down in two low chairs on the terrace, Albinia having decided to finish the evening with a book in the winter garden, "light your cigar, I'll have a cigarette presently. To begin with—I believe we have found the wall!"

"Well done," I encouraged. "That's a start anyway."

"It's an old wall of rough stones," she went on, her face alight with enthusiasm, "in ruins and half grown over with moss and weeds and trails of bramble and stuff. You would hardly notice it was there unless you were specially looking for it. I think it must have been an old boundary wall; it ends quite suddenly and doesn't seem to have enclosed anything in particular. I saw there was something of the sort—a heap or mound—the day I got into the place through the hole in the fence when the policeman wasn't looking. Oh, Mr. Farjohn—" she broke off as that young man sauntered through the long window with a cigarette in his hand, "we are talking about the old wall—no

secret as far as you're concerned, you know. Do you want a light ? " she added as he fumbled vainly in his pockets.

" Thanks," he said, taking the match-box I offered and striking a light, " I must have left my matches upstairs. I don't know that I believe in your wall," he laughed, " but there's nothing like optimism when you're on a job," and with a friendly nod he went down the terrace steps and dropped into a chair just below us on the lawn.

" You haven't got to Christian names yet then ? " I observed to Diana, " which seems pretty heavy going for a run of four or five days." But the irony was lost on her.

" Mr. Farjohn hasn't really helped us much—but he may when it comes to grubbing out that bit of old wall," she complained. " I don't think he is really interested—likes to hear about what we're doing, but too lazy to do much himself. There are quite a lot of people like that."

" Whom do you mean by ' us ' ? " I asked.

" Mona Vaughan and me," was the prompt reply. " She has worked like a Trojan and she hates getting her hands dirty and her things in a mess more than anything on earth. There are one or two puzzling things," she finished, looking at me with a perplexed frown.

" And likely to be, are there not ? " I laughed. " You can hardly expect it to be all plain sailing."

" The letter says ' at the back of the old wall '. Now which side of a wall would you call the back ? " she asked earnestly.

" The other side—that is, which ever side you are not looking at it from," I replied. " That sounds

complicated, but it's all right if you think it out."

"Just so," she assented, still frowning, "so it's not much help. It means we have got to hunt on both sides of the wall. The emeralds may be hidden in the wall itself or buried in the ground."

"It's hard to believe Bertram Goodlake carried a joke so far as to bury emeralds of any value in the ground, or even in an old wall, where anybody might find them—or nobody at all—which would make it sillier than ever. It isn't common sense," I objected.

Diana shook her head obstinately.

"It's no good your being sceptical and talking about common sense. Your cousin doesn't seem to have had any, and I'm going by the letter. I am going to find those emeralds!"

"All right," I acquiesced with a shrug, "dig away—and I'll have a look round inside the house while you are grubbing about outside. There's no reason he mayn't have meant one of the walls of the house, is there?"

That seemed to strike her as an idea, but after a moment's consideration she shook her head.

"It's got to be where the sun makes a pattern on the grass," she objected.

"Is there any grass round your old wall?"

"We haven't come to it yet," she acknowledged, "but I daresay there will be when we've cleared away a bit more of the overgrowth. There's been no sun either for the last two days, if it comes to that. Mona Vaughan was complaining of the damp and cold under the trees."

"You seem to have got on fast enough with Mrs.

Vaughan," I remarked. "And what about the man with the waggling beard—Doctor something ?—Delmico, isn't it ? "

"He's a wash-out," was the inelegant reply. "I don't like him—and the extraordinary thing is Albinia has taken up with him. They recommend each other books, I believe. Mona Vaughan is quite a good sort—in her way, and has been a help. It would have been dull unearthing that wall all alone—but she is deadly frightened of getting her complexion or her hands spoilt—always wears a hugely wide-brimmed hat if there is any sun, and gloves and smart *suède* shoes, so it's all the nicer of her to come grubbing with me at that old wall."

"Were there any traces of anyone having disturbed the soil, or scratched away the moss?" I asked. Diana was quite intelligent enough to have made careful observations before beginning active operations. She shook her head.

"The whole thing looks as if it hadn't been disturbed for years. But of course it would be necessary to dig up only a very small part of the surface in order to insert a tiny box or parcel. We look most carefully every time before we explore a bit farther."

I laughed, but when I spoke I meant it seriously.

"You know, my dear girl," I began, throwing away the end of my cigar, "you are on a wild-goose chase ! Whatever that letter means, it means nothing so mad as that Bertram Goodlake buried emeralds amounting to a considerable fortune in a hole in the ground, or in the interstices of a ruined bit of stone wall ! You and Mrs. Vaughan are wasting time if you go on searching along those

lines. I grant you the letter may mean something, but it doesn't mean that!"

"Then what does it mean?" Diana asked doggedly. "It isn't much help to tell us what it *doesn't* mean."

"It may possibly refer, as I said, to one of the walls of the house. You can speak of the back of the wall of a room, just as truly as you can speak of the back of the wall of a field or park."

"How can the sun make a pattern on the grass at the back of the wall of a room?" she asked, and drew the inevitable mirror from her bag—quite automatically, for she found it was getting too dark to see, and put it back again.

"If I remember the exact wording of the letter, the postscript, wherein lies what we may call the clue—the tail with the sting in it,—is in two distinct sentences. Correct me if I am wrong. It runs—'Look at the back of the old wall; the sun makes a pattern on the grass.' It doesn't necessarily imply that the sun on the grass is at the back of the wall."

Diana looked at me doubtfully, and having been balked by the dusk of her lipstick, lit a cigarette instead.

"At the same time," I went on, "take the outside wall of one of the rooms in the house. From the point of view of anyone in the room, the back of the wall would be in the garden outside, and on the grass from which it rises, the sun might presumably make patterns—if you take an outside wall facing south or west. See what I mean?"

Diana nodded slowly.

"It's a point to be considered. I'll talk to Mona

Vaughan about it. She's made one or two good suggestions already."

"Is Mrs. Vaughan a widow—or has she got a husband, not necessarily with her—but in cold storage—or lying about anywhere?" I asked.

Diana looked at me reproachfully—so far as I could see in the growing darkness.

"I haven't asked her," she said curtly.

"How have you been getting on with Albinia since I have been away?" It was unfortunate that my wife and my sister did not get on better, with the usual result that I got landed in the soup. It doesn't pay to play peacemaker when it comes to sisters-in-law! The question set Diana going.

"Albinia said my place was by your side in London, instead of staying on alone at a strange hotel, and referred to you as poor Humphrey—which of course was the limit! So I told her things had altered since her young days, and she said the young generation had no idea of *duty*, and no doubt I would tell her the old-fashioned notion of a wife sticking to her husband had exploded with the Ark—and I said I had never heard the Ark *did* explode, but of course she knew her Bible history better than I did, and then I got busy with the lipstick—which always ends the argument because she sniffs and turns her back. But there's something odd about Albinia these days—and I don't know what it is. She's eerie!" she finished.

"What do you mean by eerie?" I asked.

"She seems to be on a stunt of her own of some sort," was the answer.

"Albinia on a stunt of her own?" I repeated incredulously.

But at this moment the man in the chair just below us rose, flung the end of a cigarette into the bushes, and strolled across the lawn into the shadow of the trees.

I had forgotten all about him.

CHAPTER X

THE following morning directly after breakfast Diana insisted on taking me off to inspect the wall, and from the moment I set eyes on it I turned it down as a hiding-place for treasure.

"Bertram Goodlake was no more likely to have hidden emeralds in such a place than he was to hide them in the moon!" I declared, after a cursory glance, and although Mrs. Vaughan, who had accompanied us, was backing up Diana in her search, I could see that in her heart she was inclined to my point of view.

"I feel convinced the clue mentioned in the letter will tell us where the emeralds are hidden, but I don't think they are buried there," she said decisively.

"I am going to leave no stone unturned," was Diana's dogged reply.

"And all you will get will be a fine crop of earwigs and centipedes and woodlice for your pains! It's all very well to turn stones metaphorically, but in practice it has its drawbacks."

"I shall make sure there is nothing there before I give up," she insisted. "You can go and hunt about the house, and Mona can either stay with me or go with you—whichever she prefers."

This placed Mrs. Vaughan in the unfortunate

position of having to choose between us, but she only laughed.

I rather hoped she would choose Diana, although to spend the morning grubbing about an old stone wall was the last thing she seemed to be prepared for. Her smartly-shod feet, long grey *suède* gloves —which I knew concealed carefully-manicured hands—and very short muslin skirt—she certainly could not afford to leave any of it on the bramble bushes—looked more suitable for indoor work, or a stroll in Hyde Park than for digging about in the damp mould and rotting leaves in which the fragment of ancient wall lay buried.

But in spite of my misgivings, she gave her vote for Diana.

"Well," I protested, "don't expect me to help you, because I don't believe the 'goods' are there. I shall have a look round inside the house, and I'll give you a call when it gets near lunch-time."

I was not altogether sorry to have the place to myself. Our affairs had been so openly discussed—what with village gossip and the newspapers, every detail seemed to have become public property—I had had no opportunity to think anything out on my own account. As soon as one theory had suggested itself it was put out of court by someone suggesting another. The murder and its results were either the theme of open discussion among my fellow guests at the hotel, or I was interviewing Inspector Drewsbury, or I was trying to satisfy insistent newspaper men without giving away any secrets. Not that much had been allowed to remain secret—or so I thought at the time.

Also, as was not unnatural, I was anxious to go

through my inheritance at leisure, especially the collection of water-colours. The house was deserted, for after what had occurred neither Dawkins nor his wife, nor anyone else in the village, would have consented to spend an hour under its roof, and the key—of which the inspector had a duplicate—was in my own possession.

As I threw open the front door to admit light and air and left the outside world behind me to cross the hall to the library, my footsteps echoed weirdly round the walls and a silence that seemed almost solid came down like a shutter. It struck an oppressive note after the innumerable tiny sounds of insects, faint stirrings of the atmosphere, the murmuring of growing things that all give a sense of life out-of-doors on even the stillest of days.

The psychological influence of an empty house is a study in itself. To draw the line where reason and common sense abdicate and imagination steps in is not altogether the simple matter it may sound; to anyone sensitive to "atmosphere," that is to say reacting readily to something outside the range of the five senses, the curious feeling of reluctance to intrude, a drawing back from one knows not what, is something beyond imagination. The house seems empty and lonely,—and yet not empty. There is a sense of brooding influences, of being watched, of presences unseen even in a house innocent of tragedy, unassociated with such grim happenings as my inheritance had seen. There, perhaps, imagination might play a major part; the place would always be tainted by a recollection of the crime but—well—have you ever noticed a child's reluctance to enter an empty room? It

will push the door open just as often as not and call a name, waiting for an answer before entering, or if silence greets it, slipping away without so much as a glance inside to make sure.

"Are houses ever empty?" was the thought that passed through my mind as I crossed the hall. "Who knows how long those who lived in them may not linger, tied to some borderland that is neither here nor there; impotent to return, reluctant to go?" and as I opened the library door and crossed the threshold I could have sworn I heard my Cousin Bertram's impish laugh from the corner in which the writing-table stood.

"So much for imagination!" I reflected with—I wouldn't have told Diana for the world—a slight shiver! Wherever old Bertram was he was not likely to be laughing! And yet—he had set us a conundrum after his own heart, and might well be entertained at our clumsy efforts to solve it.

I laughed too then, and shook myself free from morbid imaginings.

The library was oppressive. I drew up the blinds, opened the windows and looked about me.

The place had been reduced to some sort of order; not by Mrs. Dawkins, who had shaken the dust of High Oaks from her feet. Possibly the inspector's men had put things a bit to rights—closed the open drawers and bookcases, and straightened the furniture. The blotting-paper with its silent testimony to the crime committed had been removed as an "exhibit."

The studio end of the room remained much the same as when I had first seen it, the drawings still in disorder. The police seemed to have left them

severely alone, regarding them possibly with respect, or more probably as outside the limits of their investigation ; they certainly did not give the impression of being suitable hiding-places for substantial treasure ! I gravitated towards the sketches as moth to candle ; the lure of good pictures never beckons to me in vain.

Also it was brighter at that end of the room, chosen for its purpose no doubt because the light was better, and the associations of the studio setting were less sinister than those hanging over the writing-table at the other end and its swivel chair. I determined to get rid of that chair at an early opportunity.

Certainly the water-colours were good ! I had had no idea so much talent—amounting almost to genius—had lain hidden in the family !—hidden in so far as my cousin had never made any attempt to exhibit the drawings to the public in his native land, whatever he may have done abroad.

The finding of such material affairs as emeralds sank into the background ; I turned to a large portfolio propped against the wall and pulled it bodily from the floor on to the table. It had evidently been turned out by the police and the contents replaced. Dust was still clinging to some of the corners of the white mounts.

In the broad, confident sweep of brush over paper Bertram Goodlake showed strength and an enviable command of technique ; his tools had been quite evidently his servants, with a certain delicacy of touch and purity of tone, a feeling and sensitiveness of which I should never have suspected him. I hoped from a careful study of this work of his—

and in output of heart and brain a man is apt to betray himself—to discover some more human side of him than had hitherto been presented.

To judge by the variety of his subjects, there seemed to have been scarcely a corner of earth he had not visited, remaining on the spot long enough to become sufficiently attuned to his surroundings to catch the atmosphere, and to portray with surprising fidelity the salient characteristics of form and colour, of any type of scenery in which he might find himself.

For an hour I turned them over, sketch after sketch, studying each one with real pleasure; olive trees against blue skies, fir-woods overshadowed by threatening clouds, angry sea, or lake of translucent green reflecting scarlet and gold of autumn. But having approved or criticized undisturbed, at the end of the hour I returned to my first love—the little sketch Diana had put on the easel, of the old-fashioned English garden, the border with its background of discoloured bricks, and ablaze with summer flowers, under the shadow of the trees beyond. I could imagine the appeal of it to a man satiated with the brassy skies of the tropics.

A homely bit and satisfying, instinct with truth and feeling. I took my hat off to Bertram Goodlake! —but it told me nothing further of his inner self! It was to me surprising that a man so sensitive to beauty, so truthful in the portrayal of it, should have presented himself to the world in so crabbed and unattractive a guise. Was the latter a pose—a deliberate camouflage of the real man lying behind? Or was his one of those curiously-distorted person-

alities that loved beauty only for the æsthetic gratification he got out of it ?

I was still standing in front of this gem when a footstep crossed the hall and a voice said from the door, half-mockingly :

" Well, Mr. Goodlake, have you found the emeralds ? " and Mrs. Vaughan walked into the room—tired of Diana's company no doubt and of an uncongenial occupation, but, as the saying is, I could have done without her.

" I'm played out," she wailed, flinging herself into a chair. She looked both hot and weary. " Diana is so indefatigable ! And I am on your side—I don't believe the emeralds are there. They may be in the house, but it's like hunting for a needle in a bundle of hay out there ! "

" That's what the inspector says with regard to the secretary," I laughed, " and there may be no emeralds at all—or only to be found in a castle in Spain—or even no secretary ! " I turned from the sketch with a sigh. I didn't want Mrs. Vaughan—as I have already said, her nose was too long, and I don't like long noses ; and I don't care for hotel life ; I had been glad to get away from them all. But the poor woman did look tired.

" You have got yourself in a nice mess," I observed, looking at the stains on her dress and gloves.

" I hate getting in a mess," she laughed, " and I can't bear dirty hands—and I've torn my dress," she displayed a three-cornered rent in the brickdust muslin skirt.

" I suppose Diana is still grubbing ? She is very pertinacious," I observed.

" She certainly is ! " Mrs. Vaughan assented.

"Too pertinacious to suit me. This is the first time I have been inside the house. Where was the body found?" She shivered, and added: "No—don't tell me, I would rather not know," and she turned to look at the sketches with interest. "The police wouldn't let anyone in while you were away, not even Diana—though I believe she did get in somewhere when they weren't looking."

"I bet she did!" I murmured.

"Dr. Delmico tried to get in, too," she went on. "He's burning with curiosity, especially about everybody's dreams. But the police turned him down. I happened to be in the road at the time. He was very angry and the policeman didn't turn a hair. Everyone seems interested in the murder."

"It's very kind of them," but the irony was thrown away on her.

"I oughtn't to have referred to it in that offhand way perhaps," she added, "but it's so talked about that one forgets."

"Don't bother about sparing my feelings," I rejoined. "I am getting used to it by now, and I only knew my cousin very slightly."

"Did you ever visit him abroad?" she asked. "He seems to have travelled some." She gave an inimitable American twist to the word.

"I hadn't seen him for years. He was generally at the other side of the globe."

She looked round at the objects in the studio curiously, her eyes dwelling here and there, apparently interested in the novelty.

"Are you familiar with studios?" I asked.

"I like them better than libraries—I don't care for books," she replied. "Diana said we should

find a clue in the house. Would it be a clue to the emeralds? It's like a treasure hunt." She laughed, eyes gleaming: "Most exciting! What *is* the clue?"

I smiled. "If I could tell you that I could save the police a lot of trouble," I rejoined. "I don't even know to what it is a clue! But I believe it is to the murder in some way—what we are all looking for. It may only be a clue to the hiding-place of the emeralds. The inspector doesn't think much of it anyhow, and perhaps he is right. Are you fond of water-colours?" as her wandering eyes fell on the portfolio of sketches. "Come and have a look at these."

She rose and crossed to the table, smoothing the hair that curled over each ear, below her hat, with her hands.

"I forgot they were so grimy." She laughed, displaying the stains of grass and mould on her gloves. Then after a slight hesitation: "Are you the artist?"

"I wish I were! No such luck—but I know a good drawing when I see it. This is the gem of the lot, to my mind," pointing to my favourite on the easel.

She glanced at it carelessly, and I decided she cared no more for paintings than she did for books.

"I don't much admire summer scenes in gardens," she replied, "too ordinary." Then, looking at me with a sort of sly amusement: "You know, Diana thinks you are working hard, looking for those emeralds and turning everything upside down, and I don't believe you've given them a thought! She will tell me off too if she finds me sitting idling here!"

"I can't see my wife 'telling off' anyone," I said stiffly, wishing that same wife would come and entertain her friend herself.

"I was only joking," she explained. "But Diana *is* keen about anything she takes up, you must admit. She will pull that wall down before she gives up!"

I laughed, offered her a cigarette, which she accepted, drew a little silver match-box from her bag and slipped off her hat, revealing a shingled head, with a coppery sheen to it that I had already noticed in the hotel under the gleam of the amber-shaded electric lights, and upon which Albinia had passed some remarks of a depreciatory nature at dinner. In spite of her long nose, I decided again she was a very good-looking woman.

"Treasure hunts have always fascinated me," she went on, "real ones, I mean—not the game played in London a short time ago by young people with cars and nothing better to do. Fancy going to the other side of the world on the strength of a tradition about sunk ships and buried gold, facing hardship, perhaps, and danger and not knowing what you were going to find at the end of it! There's excitement! Talk about thrills! What thrill on earth could equal that?"

"So long as you do find something at the end of it," I remarked dryly. "There may be another sort of thrill awaiting you!"

She laughed.

"My cousin's find hasn't brought him any good," I went on, "not that I fancy he underwent either hardship or danger in his quest of the emeralds—

if there ever were any—they were bought and sold, I believe, in the usual prosaic way."

"Why do you say—if there were any?" she asked. "Is there any doubt about it?"

"I should be inclined to take everything said with a grain of salt," I replied. "He had a sardonic humour that led him to find amusement in other people's misfortunes or disappointments. I can easily imagine him setting us all on the hunt after a quarry existing in his imagination only, and laughing up his sleeve at our feverish efforts."

Mrs. Vaughan turned away with a shiver.

"What a character to give the poor man!" she said. "But as, by your own admission, you knew very little about him, I prefer to think the emeralds are—well, somewhere on this mortal globe, and," she added with a nod of emphasis in my direction, "I shall help Diana in her search for them. My own idea is," she paused and went on slowly, "that the lunatic man not only committed the murder, but probably found the jewels and, attracted by the glitter, took them and dropped them, or may even have hidden them somewhere as I believe magpies do, and they will be found in the woods. That seems to me a more sensible idea than looking for them in that old wall."

"How did he get the weapon?" I asked.

She slightly lifted a shoulder and turned over idly the sketches that lay about on the table.

"That problem should surely be solvable? He may have stolen it. Have the police inquired if anyone in the neighbourhood has missed one?"

"You may be sure they have not neglected such

an A B C of their profession. The weapon appears to have vanished with the murderer."

"He may have hidden it with the emeralds."

I laughed.

"You are crediting him with a surprising amount of intelligence for a lunatic," I rejoined, "in the removal of the traces of his crime, and also of being a congenital idiot in ever having committed it! As a matter of fact, I believe he is neither—just mentally deficient in one or two directions, without ever having shown any tendency towards vice or violence of any sort. That is Inspector Drewsbury's report."

She dropped the still glowing end of her cigarette without any regard to the drawings littering the floor; I hastily put a foot on it.

"Where would you begin to search if you were me?" I followed her glance round the room. "Remember the police have already had a good look in all the likely places."

"Then we must tackle the unlikely ones," she rejoined, "like looking for mushrooms when someone else has been over the ground before you. Any loose boards about? I wonder what the clue is exactly?" Her eyes travelled slowly round the points of the compass, and returned to meet my own. "This is an old house, and sometimes in old houses there are bricks in the chimney with holes behind them."

"Loose boards and secret holes in the chimney, something to begin on anyway. What about priests' holes and powdering closets?" I added. She paid no attention.

"How about the stuffing of the chairs?" she

went on, warming to the work and running a hand round a tapestry-covered seat. "The police seem to have ripped this one up already! The cover has been cut open and then pushed down at the back again."

"Then we may be sure there is nothing there," I said absently. I was not attending.

Through the window behind the writing-table a view of the garden—if an area of weeds and a few vagrant blossoms could be called by the name—and beyond it of the fields stretching down to the road below, was visible; as I looked out I saw the man Farjohn come out from a patch of scrub, glance about him, and disappear with every appearance of haste behind the hedge that bordered one of the fields.

This was not all.

Before I had recovered from a slight feeling of surprise, another figure, obviously following the first, also came out of the scrub, stood still for a moment staring about her, hesitated, started in one direction, changed her mind, and disappeared abruptly in another.

It was Albinia!

CHAPTER XI

MRS. VAUGHAN recalled me to my senses. She was apparently repeating a question for the third time, and getting rattled.

But I was wondering—firstly, why Farjohn was prowling about my property; secondly, why Albinia was sleuthing him—or trying to, for, judging by the divergence of direction each of them had taken, he had very evidently given her the slip. From her manner and secretiveness of gesture, I felt sure she was on his trail.

At the same moment Diana appeared in the doorway.

"You and Mona aren't going to knock yourselves up with overwork, are you!" she remarked ironically, flinging herself into a chair, "and you have taken the soft side of this job too! I am nearly dead, grubbing round that old wall—and I don't believe there is anything there!"

"I never imagined there was," I rejoined, nettled at the attitude she was adopting, and a bit on edge from having been saddled with Mrs. Vaughan for the best part of an hour when I had wished to be alone. "You had much better put your wits to work before you begin with your hands. How about those buttresses on each side of the dining-room window? It faces south. They're old enough to answer the description, and there's grass all round

the foot of them for the sun to make a pattern on!"

"That might be an idea," Diana replied, "but there isn't any sun. I am not going to dig any more to-day, and I've broken a finger-nail trying to pick the stones out of that old wall. Look at my dress!" she laughed.

"Look at your hands!" Mrs. Vaughan retorted.

"I don't take such care of them as you do, and it will all come out in the wash," Diana said carelessly, holding up her slim and mould-begrimed fingers for inspection. "You two people don't seem to have been doing much. What were you talking about?"

"I was doing the talking," Mrs. Vaughan complained. "Mr. Goodlake was so busy looking out of the window he forgot to answer."

I hastened to apologize.

"What were you looking at?" Diana asked quickly.

"If you glance out of the window yourself you'll see what I was looking at," I replied suavely, "—the view."

My wife shot me a baleful glance from her hazel eyes.

"There's nothing particular to look at there!"

"Not now," I replied, "but a minute or so ago Albinia was adorning the middle of the landscape at the bottom of the field."

"Albinia! What was *she* up to? I told you she was off on a stunt of her own."

"But you didn't mention what particular kind of stunt—whatever that may be."

"You are not a judge of His Majesty's Courts, Humphrey, so you needn't pretend not to under-

stand English as she is spoke!" Diana retorted. "Let's go back to the hotel; it must be close on luncheon time. Dr. Delmico will be dying to know what we have been doing, and even the Verilees couple will sit up and take notice when they hear we have been digging by the wall. We will start searching the house later on."

Some days had passed since I had seen the inspector, and when about three-thirty that afternoon I was told he wished to speak to me, I was interested to hear how the case was getting on. We had undergone a perfect bombardment of questions on our return from High Oaks. Had we found the emeralds?—were the police still there?—had Dawkins been arrested?—were the police looking for the secretary?—had the weapon been found?—was the lunatic under lock and key? Dr. Delmico, in particular, was full of bright suggestions, and Major Forsythe was beginning to think the methods of the Indian police, in some respects, were more efficacious than ours.

The only members of the party at the hotel who had no suggestions to offer were—Albinia, who was evidently nursing some private schemes of her own; Farjohn, who apparently took no interest in the situation at all, due perhaps to the fact of being a new-comer and not actually in the neighbourhood when the tragedy had taken place; and Miss Alpha Lorne, to whom Diana continued to refer as the "highbrow" or "all forlorn," which was excusable, as anyone with such a pagan name deserved all she got. Even the Verilees couple forgot each other now and then to concentrate on the problem the gods had laid at our feet.

"Why you should conclude Miss Lorne is 'highbrow'—whatever that may mean—because she is writing a book, I fail to understand," I remonstrated. "She doesn't strike me as particularly intelligent, and Lord knows some of the books nowadays are no guarantee of brains at the back of them. It's just a case of taking a formula, a recipe—two pounds of conversation—mostly inane—to three pounds of description, one male to one female star part, a villain, a dramatic situation—pepper and salt—a grain of the latter to be taken by the reader——"

"Very bright and clever, but you see you have never written a book," my wife interposed.

"No more have you," I riposted.

"But I'm going to," she rejoined, and her morning performance having exhausted her desire for exertion, she proceeded to settle herself in a chair on the lawn with a supply of cigarettes and a novel.

Mrs. Vaughan had disappeared. I suspected a post-prandial siesta for the good of the complexion.

My interview with Inspector Drewsbury took place in the winter garden, deserted for the moment in favour of the open air.

His attitude puzzled me. For his own sake I felt he must be keen on solving the mystery, and yet in some respects he seemed to present a half-hearted interest, and to adopt means of investigation that would lead to nowhere.

He was still barking up the Dawkins tree. Nothing had transpired to incriminate the man further, and it certainly did seem as though the police were not putting as much backbone and energy into it

as they might. The clue of the ship's tobacco caught in the bunch of keys had led to nothing, and all Drewsbury appeared to be doing with regard to Dawkins was to set a watch on him.

There was still no trace of the pistol, and when I asked if they were trying to track the secretary, he replied apathetically they were doing their best, but vouchsafed no further details. I began to think Diana's views of Scotland Yard were perhaps not so jaundiced after all.

But he was up against Albinia!

"There are too many people in this show, sir," he complained. "If there's one amateur getting busy in a case it's one too many, and this place is fair buzzing with 'em!"

"But they can't be interfering with your theories, Inspector. They are far too busy following up their own."

"There's that doctor," he went on, puckering his under-lip with finger and thumb: "Professor—I don't know what he is—Delmico his name is—sounds foreign——talks English. He was in the police station in Paignhamstead day before yesterday—wanting to know what the lunatic chap dreams about! Dreams about!" the scorn in tone and attitude baffles description, "—says if he knew that he could tell in a minute whether or not he committed the murder. He ought to be in an asylum himself—and I was near telling him as much! Then there's the newly-married young lady—goes about as if she was looking for something, if her husband is out of sight for half a minute. She says if she found the murderer to-morrow she wouldn't tell the police so long as the law of Eng-

land permits capital punishment—against it she is. Gave me quite a lecture about it—and Major Forsythe talks about the Indian police and what they'd have done if they'd been me, and didn't I think it would be worth my while to go across to Paris and study the methods there? And then there's Miss Goodlake, and—saving your presence, sir—I'm blest if she isn't the worst of the lot!"

He ran a handkerchief over a brow upon which globules of perspiration stood out in eloquent testimony to his state of mind as well as body.

"I am sorry," I said sympathetically. "Sit down, Inspector, and we'll have a drink," and I waited until a waiter had supplied us with something bubbling in long glasses, ice tinkling pleasantly against the sides, before I cautiously attempted to fathom the depths of Albinia's misdemeanours.

"The truth is, sir," my companion began after a long and deep pull at his glass, and a glance round to make sure we were alone, "it's—" he hesitated, "well, it's Mr.—er—Farjohn who's making the complaint. Miss Goodlake follows him about, so he says—won't let him alone—can't get rid of her. If he goes out walking, she'll pop out from behind a hedge, or he'll find her peeping over a gate or dodging behind the bushes in the garden. Got a down on him—Lord knows why. You might give her a hint, sir—or as likely as not there'll be trouble."

I promised to do what I could about it, but the hint would have to be pretty broad before Albinia was likely to take it. And the worst of it was, it was probably true. I remembered what I had seen from the window at High Oaks, and wondered again what on earth Albinia was up to.

"Never knew such a case," he grumbled, "nor so many tales spread about!"

"You can't stop people talking," I protested, "once they get going on a sensational affair of this sort right under their noses. They haven't done much harm, Inspector, all the same; it's been all talk—just amusing themselves by starting different hares. Nothing to have interfered with your business."

He laughed grimly.

"I have seen to that all right, sir! They don't know *everything* by any means." I wondered exactly what he meant by that. "And one thing they don't seem to know anything about—and I don't want 'em to—was that cigarette-case. At least, they don't talk about it, and that's what matters. The Dawkinses won't blab. I've told Mrs. Dawkins the less she talks about having hidden it in a drawer the better," his thin lips relaxed in a grin, "Will you please keep it dark too, sir?"

"How do you know what they talk about?" I asked quickly. "Not that I have heard any mention of the cigarette-case. Have you found out anything more about who it belongs to?"

He shook his head.

"We tried it for finger-prints, but nothing doing. Mrs. Dawkins's all over it—and yours, sir," he added with a grin.

"How did you know my finger-prints?" I asked with some interest.

"You handled the case if you remember, at the time—and it was easily verified," was the evasive reply, "but as you are not under suspicion it don't matter."

"Why shouldn't I be under suspicion?" I asked, thinking backwards. "I benefited by my cousin's death."

"Alibi—watertight!" he laughed. "You were in your house in South Hans Square at the time of the murder."

So he actually had made inquiries! To that extent I *had* been under suspicion. Inquiries made of Rickman, my man, probably, and Blake, the chauffeur!

It's odd how quick one is to resent such perfectly justifiable action on the part of authority. It struck me that perhaps he was taking more trouble over the case after all than I had suspected. My resentment evaporated as quickly as it arose, but I wondered what Diana would have said to it!

"There were two cigarettes in that case, sir; I don't know if you noticed at the time—Craven A.s—no good—anybody might smoke Craven A. The motto on the outside might be a clue."

"Let's see—how did it run?"

"—'And may your trouble end in smoke.' Sounds silly—tag end of something as likely as not. Don't see where it leads to now—and we don't know that Mrs. Dawkins found it where she said she did—but something may turn up." He rose.

"You still think it may be Dawkins?" I asked as we parted.

"Best not ask what I think," he parried, "at any rate, we've got to find that secretary," with which inconclusive observation he left.

It was all very fine to ask me to give Albinia a hint, but she wasn't the sort of person to whom a hint would be of any use. She wouldn't understand

one half of it, and would pretend she didn't understand the other. I decided to let her alone. Her secret activities were keeping her employed, and so long as she and Diana met only at meals the sort of armed truce there always was between them was more likely to remain unbroken. Farjohn was quite capable of fighting his own battles. You may be responsible for your wife's torts, but your sister's can look out for themselves.

At dinner Diana announced she had invited Mrs. Vaughan to join us for coffee on the terrace.

"Was it absolutely necessary to ask her?" I sighed. "I seem to have had enough of Mrs. Vaughan for one day."

"Why?" Diana asked tersely.

"Her nose is too long," I answered. "I can't think of any of the other reasons at the moment."

"Before you were married, Humphrey, you wouldn't have let a little thing like that prejudice you," Albinia remarked, looking aggressively across the table at Diana.

"But since he has been married his standards have gone up," Diana said sweetly. I wanted to laugh, but of course I didn't. On these occasions I found a grave impartiality the best policy.

"It wasn't absolutely necessary to ask Mona Vaughan," Diana went on, throwing me a reproachful glance, "but it's the least one can do after letting her slave for us all the morning!"

Albinia sniffed. It's curious how eloquent a sniff can be; the most eloquent gesture in the world. Anyway Albinia's is, and my wife never fails to react to it.

"Sniffs are thrown away upon us, Albinia," she

said—which of course proved that they were not. "Mona Vaughan worked like a Trojan all the morning, grubbing away at that old wall!"

"I understood she was making herself agreeable to Humphrey half the time," my sister rejoined.

"And why shouldn't she?" Diana asked serenely. "While we worked, you, Albinia, were sitting at ease, I suppose, leaving this mystery it is our duty to solve in the hands of Providence."

"I trust I am content to leave all the events of this life in the hands of Providence!" was the pious retort. "Providence——"

"Is all very well, but *Scotland Yard* is on the telephone," Diana interposed, "which is no doubt what you were going to say?"

This was too much for Albinia; she pushed her chair back.

"There is no need to be blasphemous!" she snapped. "And I may tell you, you are all chasing the wrong hare! I have not been quite so idle as I may have seemed!"

Here was a chance for the hint!

"I am sure of it, Albinia," I broke in. "But it really would be better to let justice take its course and not interfere on your own account. It may lead to trouble," I added meaningly, "among the other visitors at the hotel."

Albinia regarded me defiantly. She was evidently near the end of her forbearance.

"Perhaps I may know something the police *don't* know. Ask the inspector," she said with impressive deliberation, "what Mr. Farjohn was doing slipping out of the front door of High Oaks this afternoon about four o'clock—when you,

Humphrey, were comfortably dozing in an armchair in the winter garden—and you, Diana, were reading a detective novel, or some such rubbish, and expecting Mr. Farjohn for tea at 4.30. I may know as much as other people after all!" and having dropped her squib, she turned her back and left the room before I had sufficiently recovered to make any reply.

Diana and I looked at one another.

"Bats in the belfry!" she said with sudden decision. "That's what's the matter with Albinia! What on earth would Mr. Farjohn be doing—slipping in and out of front doors! She's mistaken somebody else for him. Let's go outside."

"There he is!" she remarked a moment later as, bound for the terrace, we were passing through the winter garden. "Mr. Farjohn!" she called, "come and have coffee with us. It's such a lovely evening."

The invitation was accepted without hesitation, and we passed out into the calm peace of a summer's evening and the sweet scents lured by the dusk from reluctant blossoms, a setting as far removed from the atmosphere of tragedy and murder as Nature could devise.

Mrs. Vaughan was already seated on the terrace smoking a cigarette and talking to Major Forsythe, who was launched on his favourite topic, the superiority of the Indian police. The lady was looking bored, and on Mr. Farjohn's appearance in our wake, she transferred her attention to the younger man.

"Mr. Farjohn, you are the most uncommunicative person I ever met!" she rallied. "Here we are, all of us talking of this mysterious business—

the tragedy, I mean—and you never say a word. An oyster is a chatterbox in comparison. Are you meditating on it too deeply for speech, or do you just take no sort of interest in it at all ? "

Farjohn fingered his unlit cigarette and smiled.

" I suppose I take as much interest in it as other people," he said slowly, " but at present I have an open mind. What is your own theory about it ? Do you suspect anyone in particular ? "

" The lunatic," was the prompt reply. " I don't see any reason to doubt it. Why shouldn't it have been he ? He had the opportunity—we know that—got hold of a pistol somehow,—and there you are ! I can't see why there's any trouble about it. In my opinion it's the *emeralds* we're looking for, not the murderer—or the clue to them," she finished thoughtfully. " I wonder what it is ! "

" The old wall—and the pattern on the grass," Diana said promptly, " that's the clue all right. We shall find the emeralds behind some old wall."

" Pretty vague, isn't it ? In any part of the country there are old walls to be found," Mrs. Vaughan rejoined. " I believe Mr. Goodlake is right, and it means one of the walls of the house. Is there a safe hidden in the walls anywhere ? "

As she looked at me for an answer, I said—not so far as I knew. And if there were, it wouldn't explain the grass and the sunshine.

She nodded, drew a match from a little silver match-box and started another cigarette. Farjohn borrowed the match-box and put a light to his own, staring at the lighted end rather abstractedly.

"I haven't given the subject much consideration," he remarked, still staring at the glowing end, "but I can't help thinking you are all on the wrong tack. This clue, or riddle, or whatever it is, was set by a cranky old man with a passion for puzzles, and probably has nothing to do with the tragedy at all. If I were the police I should get busy about that secretary, who—I give you the idea for what it is worth—probably killed the old man, pinched the emeralds, has taken another name, and should be searched for somewhere on the other side of the globe. That is where the police should turn their attention."

"Wherever they turn it, it will be just where the secretary *isn't!*" Diana remarked witheringly, raising a general laugh.

"That is where the police should search—not in England," Farjohn went on without joining in the laugh, staring abstractedly at the match-box lying in his hand; and turning it over to catch a gleam from the fading sky before repeating slowly: "South America possibly, or Africa, but not in England. And that, I expect, is just what they are doing. I seem to have made rather a long speech," he added to Mrs. Vaughan, returning her property with a word of thanks, "and of course I am only guessing, but I had to redeem my character after having been accused of bivalvular tendencies," he finished with a laugh.

"Anyway, it will put the criminal off the scent if he should be in England, to give out he is being searched for abroad," Major Forsythe observed sententiously.

"It will help the police a lot to spread that

about!" Diana remarked, but the sarcasm was thrown away.

Farjohn was moving off when Diana called to him—I thought rather unnecessarily:

"I hope you will join our search party to-morrow morning, Mr. Farjohn? Fresh ideas brought to bear work wonders sometimes." And: "So much for Albinia!" she added to me under her breath.

CHAPTER XII

SO in the morning the search party, as Diana called it, found itself augmented by Farjohn. It was a grey morning, not so hot as it had been, and Diana was full of hope and energy as she collected the necessary tools from a shed in the corner of the desolate wilderness to which was given the courtesy title of garden.

It must be admitted that the new recruit worked loyally with trowel and fork round the foot of the stone buttresses flanking the dining-room windows, but I had the gravest doubts of any successful issue. I agreed with Diana up to the point of believing the emeralds had been hidden somewhere at High Oaks, and that in the letter lay the clue. But the clue itself, even if we discovered it, might only be a clue to a further clue.

Also, Farjohn might be right in his surmise, and the secretary, having committed the murder, may have got off with the goods, and we might all be chasing a will o' the wisp. That was evidently the inspector's opinion, for he certainly did not seem to be worrying much about investigations on the scene of action. I supposed he was concentrating his efforts on the search for the elusive secretary in foreign countries.

As before, Mrs. Vaughan soon wearied of her incursions into the soil and, leaving Diana and

Farjohn to pursue them, invaded the library to wander restlessly round the room. I was busy at the writing-table sorting out some of the papers in the drawers. I noticed that the inspector had confiscated the automatic which had been found in one of them after my cousin's death—possibly to be classed among the " exhibits " as the weapon with which the crime had *not* been committed.

" You don't appear to have been working very hard this morning, Mrs. Vaughan," I remarked, with a glance at her immaculate condition. " No luck outside there yet, I suppose ? "

She shook her head.

" I am tired of it !—and I believe the stones are inside the house, not outside," she answered, walking round the bookcases and peering in through the glass doors in the desultory fashion of a person who does not really care for books, " and anyway I don't think it's any good digging at those buttresses. That is not where they are hidden."

" What makes you say that ? " I asked.

" The sun came out for a moment half-an-hour ago, and the only pattern on the grass was the shadow of the buttress. You can't call a plain, clean-cut, hard and fast shadow a pattern—I don't, anyway. Even Diana was damped."

" Is she still digging ? "

" Oh yes. She seemed to think she might as well see it out ; but I call it waste of time."

" So do I," I agreed, " but my wife won't be content unless everything has been tried. No man in his senses would bury emeralds outside in the ground ! There may possibly be a hiding-place in one of those old buttresses, but I don't think so.

The police have searched my cousin's bedroom as well as this room and found nothing. If there *is* a clue in the place they have overlooked it, but I will go over the hall again to make sure."

Diana drifted in through the library window as I spoke, followed, to my surprise, by Albinia.

"Where's Farjohn?" I asked.

"Gone back to the hotel," Diana replied. "Albinia appeared unexpectedly round the corner of the house, and he went off like a hare."

"Don't be silly!" Albinia said sharply.

"Didn't like the look of you, Albinia?" I remarked, and Mrs. Vaughan sniggered.

"That was a real brotherly remark, wasn't it?" I added remorsefully, laying a hand on her shoulder. I wasn't going to encourage a stray hotel visitor like Mrs. Vaughan to snigger at my sister.

"No doubt Mr. Farjohn had excellent reasons for returning to the hotel," she replied coldly.

"I am going to do a bit of serious thinking," Diana announced, flinging herself into a chair, and producing mirror and powder-puff, mainly for Albinia's benefit. "I am fed up with digging. Can't anybody remember where the stately homes of England kept their swag?" A sniff from Albinia at this point encouraged further efforts from the speaker. "Do still very likely. Hiding-places for loot—priests' holes, shifting panels and so on. One of your ancestors fought in the battle of Agincourt, didn't he, Albinia? Where did he keep all the stuff he pinched?" She gave a final flourish with the lipstick and replaced it in her bag.

"My ancestors were not in the habit of pinching—if by that you mean stealing," Albinia replied

stiffly, turning her back and walking to the farther end of the room.

"That's odd—because Humphrey's ancestors seem to have pinched anything they could lay their hands on whenever they got a chance. They seem to have got loot from all parts of the world, and had their own family motto engraved on it—' Honesty and Justice before all '—only it's in Latin. If *your* ancestors didn't go in for pinching it seems to mix up the family tree a bit, doesn't it ? "

But Albinia professed not to hear the remark. She was turning over the water-colours at the studio end of the room with the keen appreciation of the connoisseur, for it was the one direction in which we shared a common interest. I joined her to discuss the merits of the garden scene Diana and I had put on the easel for special inspection, and which had at once caught her attention. There was a crisp freshness in the style that grew upon the eye the more one studied it.

" Pretty good, don't you think ? " I began, but Mrs. Vaughan's voice raised plaintively at the other end of the room brought me to a full stop.

" I'm so hungry ! " she cried. " Are we never going back to luncheon ?—and I believe it's going to rain ! "

So rather dispiritedly we all climbed into the car, and I drove them back to the hotel.

Peter Lanham arrived the following morning. He ran down in his two-seater, said he'd got a week's leave—whether on the score of a deceased grandmother I did not inquire—and engaged a small room on the top story of the hotel.

He was a nice enough lad. Diana's casual an-

nouncement that she had as nearly married him as didn't matter was perhaps an over-statement of the case ; true in the main but coloured a bit vividly for Albinia's benefit. There had been a time not so very far off when I had taken for granted a boy and girl attachment between them was going to lead to something more definite, and I had loyally afforded every chance to a rival with youth in his favour to further his suit, for—as I imagined—Diana's sake.

Not that he had been conscious of any possibility of rivalry between us. He had no doubt looked upon me as a hoary Methuselah out of the running, so had the Mollys and Dorothys and Amabels who had been wont to confide their lovers' quarrels to my bachelor ears, taking for granted that at an age so advanced as my own I must have relinquished long ago any personal interest in amatory adventure, and be sufficiently detached to see—quite impartially, of course—how right they had been in the skirmish, and how obviously the other side hadn't a leg to stand upon.

But whatever the opinion of girls in their teens, one is not approaching senile decay at five-and-thirty, or even at forty, and had I not been amused I might have been inclined to resent their attitude. At the same time the male heart is so constituted that an appealing eye or wistful smile applied in the right manner at the right moment rarely misses its mark, with the result that I had played buffer in lovers' quarrels ordered, in my opinion, specially by Cupid to further his designs, to find myself transformed into an incubus when they suddenly and for no apparent reason made it up ; gooseberry till I was

bored to death when it suited them, and arbitrator in delicate situations, to have my nose bitten off by both sides when arbitration became no longer necessary. I could, in fact, write a bookful of rather spicy memoirs, and probably shall.

Why Diana should have chosen me as her life's partner rather than Peter Lanham, or any other of the dozen or so of England's young manhood who were eager to lay themselves and their fortunes at her feet will always remain an insoluble problem. She says she doesn't know herself. Enough for me that she did it. I fancied that in some way Lanham had fallen in her estimation for the part he had taken in the previous tragic affair of Adrian Paterson's disappearance. In spite of it, friendly relations between them had never been broken, and I was pleased enough to see him whenever he liked to put in an appearance. There was something catching about Peter's irresponsible cheerfulness, and as, seated on the terrace at the Paignhamstead Arms, a party of us were enjoying our after-luncheon coffee and cigarettes, his casual "Hullo, old thing!" broke in upon us, everyone turned with an instinctive smile of welcome.

The special object of the ejaculation being left to the imagination, Diana appropriated it and made room for his chair beside her own.

"This is Peter Lanham," she announced, waving her cigarette with a circular movement that deposited its superfluous ash in Albinia's lap. "He has come here by special request to give a hand in the sleuthing."

"I am sure the inspector will be very much obliged to him," Albinia remarked dryly, dusting

her knee ostentatiously and moving her chair a little farther from Diana's.

"I didn't invite him on the inspector's account," Diana retorted. "If we wait for Scotland Yard to get a move on we shall be a fixture here for ever. I am not going to leave Paignhamstead till that clue is found, so the more searchers there are the better."

Peter asked: "What clue?" and three people, all speaking at once, immediately started to put him wise. Mrs. Vaughan told him in her rather emphatic way the clue to the murder lay with the lunatic; Dr. Delmico declared the whole matter could be solved if more attention were paid to the psychological side; and—to my great surprise—Miss Lorne, the "highbrow" girl with the eye-glasses, hitherto a negligible unit so far as sociability was concerned, gave it as her opinion that we were all on the wrong tack, that she had lately been reading a history of Scotland Yard and its methods, and that she had her own ideas on the subject which she didn't intend to give away at the moment—an emergence from the twilight of self-effacement into the limelight so unexpected that Major Forsythe forgot to mention the Indian police, and Farjohn, who had been sitting on the outskirts of the circle, rose with a smile and strolled away.

"Let us put the affair concisely," Diana interposed, flicking the end of her cigarette over the balustrade; it lodged on the top; Albinia rose, stabbed at the still glowing end with a stone selected from the gravel until it was out, and returned to her seat.

"The situation, Peter, is this. First—the

murder; you have read all about that in the newspapers. Then the suspects—you may have read all about that too, but you probably didn't understand it. It stands like this. First—a lunatic——" she ticked them off on her fingers while enumerating the various persons included in her category of suspects.

"First—and last," Mrs. Vaughan murmured, but Diana paid no attention.

"—known to have been at large," she went on: "Bertram Goodlake's keys found on him—but no weapon. Might have hidden it somewhere—but wouldn't have been much of a lunatic if he had. Would have had to have stolen it from somebody—and no automatic missing in the neighbourhood. Then—Dawkins, the caretaker—nothing but his own story of how he found the body—his own explanation of how he dropped the keys. Mrs. Dawkins tells of footsteps round the house—a motor-car below the field. No corroboration. Ship's tobacco stuck among the keys—Dawkins has a nephew in the navy. Not that that's any evidence either way as Dawkins doesn't deny the keys were in his pocket, where they might have picked up fragments of the tobacco—a present from the nephew."

"Was this chap Dawkins in the house at the time of the murder?" Lanham asked.

"He says he was half-way down the drive, and that no one was in the house except Bertram Goodlake—says he heard the shot and thought at the time it was a tyre exploding. But we have only got his unsupported statement."

Lanham pursed his lips and raised his eyebrows.

"Yes, I know," Diana replied to the gesture, "but the inspector seems to be banking on Dawkins—in spite of all anyone says to the contrary. He is very obstinate and opinionated—everybody connected with Scotland Yard always is—and I can't get him to see sense."

"What do you call sense?" Peter asked doubtfully.

I smiled. Mrs. Vaughan laughed out loud. Major Forsythe coughed. Miss Lorne, her previous air of detachment so unaccountably discarded, nodded sapiently and dropped her eye-glasses.

"Looking at the affair from Diana's point of view!" Albinia remarked acidly, "that's what she calls sense."

But if she had imagined Diana's equanimity was going to be upset it was a mistake.

"That is just what I do mean," she retorted, eyeing us all calmly, "there *is* only one point of view—and that is that the secretary did the murder. If Scotland Yard, instead of bothering about lunatics and Dawkins, would find the secretary, we should get a move on—and also find the emeralds," and she proceeded to enlighten Peter Lanham at some length about the first letter received from my cousin, and the fragment of the second.

"So you see," she finished, "Bertram Goodlake himself foresaw who was going to murder him—if he *was* murdered," she added, getting a little mixed up in her phrases, "but we don't know his name, nor where he is, nor a thing more about him—or about the emeralds either. And there's a clue at High Oaks, and you've got to help us look for it!"

The party had drifted away while she was speaking—they knew it all by heart—with the exception of Mrs. Vaughan and Miss Alpha Lorne. Albinia having dropped her bomb and found it to be a dud, had risen some time before and gone off on her own affairs.

Miss Lorne replaced her glasses and gazed through them earnestly at Peter.

"Are you good at sleuthing, Mr. Lanham?" she asked.

"Good in spots," Diana answered for him, "and anyway the more we have on the job the more chance there is of finding the clue. Where is Mr. Farjohn?" she added and, rising, drifted away in the direction of the winter garden.

She was beginning to see a good bit of Farjohn, and I wondered how he and Peter would get on. I had little faith in the latter's powers as a detective.

It was beginning to dawn on Diana that the clues so obvious and clear-cut in detective stories, are not always so easy to follow up in practical earnest. So much elimination of the superfluous is done for the reader in fiction, tares sifted from wheat, that half the trouble and complication of sleuth work in real life is spared him. The limelight is directed upon the special points that are intended to rivet his attention; signposts guide his footsteps into the right road, and the Sherlock Holmeses and Inspector Frenches of story-books have half their work done for them. I hoped that Diana's discovery that clues are not always what they seem, might soften her attitude towards Scotland Yard as represented by Inspector Drewsbury.

It is curious what a gulf of difference lies between

circumstances visualized only, and those same circumstances when presented in the hard light of practical experience. I knew that in imagination Diana had seen a hundred possible and likely hiding-places at High Oaks, inside the house and out, for the emeralds for which we were searching. In her mind's eye she had doubtless pictured a wide field to be explored, with lights that would point subtly but unmistakably to the right road for investigation, though that road might start a long way from journey's end.

Without experience it would be difficult for her to have realized that with her wealth of imagination and really bright wits she would find herself faced by a hopeless slough of confusion, not knowing where to begin, surrounded by the innumerable accessories of every-day existence, not one of which would appear to be more important than any other, or more likely to lead to the clue that had suddenly become as elusive as a politician's promise.

In fact, first to find a clue, and then to follow it up, was going to be a much more difficult job than she had foreseen !

But in spite of temporary discouragement, that afternoon Diana and Mrs. Vaughan returned to the scene of action—Diana, perhaps, on her mettle, determined that no one should beat her in the race. Luncheon had been a not altogether exhilarating function, as a coolness, resulting possibly from the remarks about ancestors exchanged during the morning, lay between Diana and my sister, and I was used as a go-between by both parties.

" Look here," I said at last, " I object to being a sort of buffer ball for you two to go into the pockets

off! You may both be very bright and clever, but I want my luncheon in peace."

Upon which Albinia rose abruptly, I thought for a moment in a huff, till I noticed Farjohn had just risen also from an adjoining table, and was making for the door.

I suppose to us mortals it will always be food for wonder that great results should accrue from little causes. I was on the point of calling to Albinia to come back, when I realized that she was timing her own exit with his. It had dawned on me by now that the inspector had been right—Albinia *was* what Diana would have called sleuthing Farjohn, an imbecile performance that could only lead to trouble. He might regard the game with mild amusement for a time—for of course he would have found her out—but the moment would arrive when it would get on his nerves and he would refuse to stand it any longer; then, of course, it would be I who would be in the soup.

But instead of calling her back, I determined to speak to her quietly at the first opportunity, and say the farce must stop. It was getting beyond a joke, and no man could be expected to put up with it—and at my procrastination the god of opportunities turned his back on me and possibly laughed in his sleeve.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was at this time I made a discovery that was to set me off on a line of my own and keep me busy for some considerable time.

The rest of the party at the hotel were each and all engaged on working out theories of their own, either separately or together, and so far I had been content to play the part of a more or less interested onlooker, giving a hand when required, but with sufficient faith in the methods of Scotland Yard to believe that whatsoever we might do they would do it infinitely better.

Diana declared this method to be not very helpful, and said Farjohn agreed with her; but it didn't strike me that Farjohn was very helpful himself. His ideas of assistance appeared to be limited to tea on the lawn with Diana and on occasion lending a hand with the excavations at High Oaks; also the consumption of innumerable cigarettes appeared to be a part of the plan. Along this latter line Diana was ready to afford him all the assistance she could.

She called it picking his brains for her book, assuring me he was well read and a man of the world, when I suggested that neither attribute would cut much ice when it came to hunting for the emeralds; but she was very much in earnest and if she got a certain amount of enjoyment out of the

Farjohn entertainment she was more than welcome to continue it.

He afforded me some amusement—I doubt if at this time it was shared by the others—as the unconscious object of Albinia's attentions. Where he went, she went also, with or without excuse for so doing. Her eyes continually strayed in his direction from our somewhat secluded table in the dining-room, and it was rapidly becoming a habit with me, whenever I saw the man, to look round instinctively for Albinia in the offing. He was apparently not very quick-witted, or he must have noticed it; but Diana had and, needless to say, instantly made it her business to comment on it.

"Albinia," she began, nodding accusingly at my sister across the luncheon table one day, "it's my belief you've fallen for Mr. Farjohn."

Peter, who was of course of our party during his stay at the hotel, allowed his features to expand in a grin.

Albinia's hand, in the act of conveying a bit of biscuit and cheese to her mouth, was arrested halfway.

"Fallen for Mr. Farjohn?" she repeated. "Perhaps you would put that into plain English."

"There are some things better not put into plain English," Diana replied, shaking her head. "But you really do follow him about rather a lot, you know."

Albinia looked annoyed.

"I have my reasons," she said coldly, allowed the biscuit and cheese to finish its journey and pushed the plate away.

"Reasons no doubt that would not have brought

a blush even to the cheeks of our grandmothers. But you do follow him about a good deal," and as Albinia made no reply, added, " and the point is, why ? "

" That's my business," Albinia retorted, none too civilly, but I suppose Diana was a bit aggravating.

" And *his*," was the rejoinder, " and when he tumbles to it there'll probably be trouble. What are you doing it for ? Do you think he has got the emeralds in his pocket ? "

" If you had met him in the same circumstances as I did——" Albinia began, and came to a sudden stop.

" Was it at a night club ? " Diana asked brightly, and Peter, using his handkerchief very violently, pushed his chair back and made for the door. He arrived there at the same time as Miss Lorne from another corner of the dining-room, and I watched him, still speechless, open the door and follow her out of the room.

" I won't say anything about it if you would rather I didn't—though some night clubs are quite respectable—" Diana added.

Albinia also pushed her chair back and looked at me over the top of the bunch of flowers always to be found on small hotel tables, presumably to make conversation more difficult.

" Humphrey ! " she exclaimed, and I knew I was in for it, " are you going to sit there and let me be insulted ? "

I looked wearily from one to the other.

" Not if you would rather I sat somewhere else," I said hopefully, with a feeble effort at facetiousness.

" As a matter of fact, I am going out to the terrace to have coffee."

She didn't know what to make of that ; Albinia is not quick at the uptake, and I might have got away with it, but unfortunately Diana sniggered.

" What's the matter with night clubs ? " she asked. " They're all right so long as they're not raided, then of course there's the devil to pay. Were you in the night club when there was a raid on, Albinia ?—and did you spend the night in a police cell ?—and is it true you have only a plank to sleep on ?—and what does it feel like going home in the morning in evening dress ? "

" How dare you say such things ? " my sister interrupted.

" I was only asking—I want to put a night club scene in my book."

" Then you'll have to get it elsewhere. I have never been in a night club in my life ! "

" How was I to know that ? " Diana rejoined, lighting a cigarette. " It's nothing to have a purple past nowadays—you needn't be ashamed of it. Everybody has one, and they like people to think they have if they haven't. Just a little patch of pale mauve is better than nothing. I shouldn't worry about that if I were you—unless of course Farjohn is blackmailing you," and before her sister-in-law could think of an answer Diana was deftly threading her way among the tables towards the door.

I looked at Albinia and laughed.

" You are more cynical than you used to be, Humphrey," she snapped. " I suppose you call it a sense of humour ! "

"You surely don't take all Diana says seriously?" I asked.

"I don't take anything the young generation says seriously," was the tart rejoinder.

"If you have never been accused of anything more serious than going to a night club," I went on, "life has let you off pretty easily, Albinia! And if you look upon them from a den-of-iniquity point of view you would be bitterly disappointed in most of them. If you wish to convert a possibly immaculate future into what Diana calls a purple past—" but at this point Albinia might be described as full to capacity, and she passed out of the dining-room without bestowing upon me another glance.

Whereupon my mind instantly reverted to Inspector Drewsbury's desire that I should give my sister a hint; by which he meant I was to suggest she should not go on asking for trouble by following Farjohn about. Personally I had shrunk from so delicate a mission.

But now I could conscientiously feel relieved of that irksome duty. Diana had conveyed the hint in language which could hardly have been plainer, and if Albinia failed to take it that was her look-out —and Farjohn's. She would probably get a hint from him sooner or later that would settle the matter once and for all.

Had I known how far I was myself to become involved I might have been less philosophical about it.

I had expected to find Peter Lanham with the rest of them on the terrace, but the place was empty, the garden chairs with their gorgeous burdens of red or orange cushions standing unoccupied in the

afternoon sunshine. Diana had disappeared, and I caught sight of the Forsythes in the far distance, starting for the walk through the woods which they considered the necessary stimulus for an appetite for dinner. Thank Heaven I have never found it imperative to take a constitutional with that object, and modern youth does not walk; at the mere suggestion he would jump into a car and flee out of hearing. The children of two or three generations hence will probably be born with wheels instead of legs.

The golfers had presumably returned to London, or wherever their respective businesses called them, which I mildly regretted. Being fond of the game, I had hoped for a round on the Paignhamstead course—not a bad course, on the hill beyond the town—with one of them when the calls on my time in connexion with the crime diminished. But a man handicapped as I am thinks twice before forcing himself on the good nature of a stranger, and I had lost my chance.

Mrs. Vaughan was also missing. The terrace was deserted and for the moment, picturing them all pleasantly engaged, Diana probably roaming the country with Peter—or Farjohn—or both—I felt a slight twinge of loneliness. Quite unreasonable, of course, and repressed immediately.

But it made me restless. I found I took no interest in any of the various papers I had collected from the hall, and my cigar had gone out.

I threw it away, and decided to go up to High Oaks. Diana and Mrs. Vaughan and Peter and the rest of them were probably there already, digging, or hunting in some utterly futile way for emeralds

which I was convinced were not there. The secretary had probably made off with them long ago. Or they might just be ragging and pretending to hunt.

There were still papers to be gone through in those drawers I had locked, and anyway it would be something to do. I had always meant to go through them carefully myself; men of my cousin's type and mode of life often had a secret or two that papers might betray, some tell-tale record slipped inadvertently among bills or old pass-books which it might be as well to destroy.

When I had turned the house over to Diana to search where and with whom she liked for what we were beginning to regard as the "mythical" clue, I had drawn the line at my cousin's papers and correspondence. The drawers in the writing-table at which he had been seated on that fateful evening I was determined should be kept sacred from prying eyes. I had transferred all documents and letters of apparent importance to those drawers which had remained undamaged by the destructive hands of the invader, and locked them securely, having glanced cursorily through them at Diana's insistent demand to make sure the hidden "light" was not concealed among them.

For some reason I did not believe it was. I had no valid basis for such a belief, but I felt that so prosaic and obvious a hiding-place as a drawer in the writing-table was not likely to have been selected by my cousin for his mysterious clue. I meant to go over them again at leisure when the library and rooms at High Oaks had ceased to be the arena for the enterprise of inquisitive amateurs in detection. I had no wish to exclude Diana, of course, only

some of the chance acquaintances she might invite to assist her in the search. To share private matters with one's wife is one thing ; to allow strangers to poke and pry into what does not concern them is quite another.

The casual glance I had taken at the papers immediately after the tragedy had failed to disclose anything of even ordinary interest, much less of a sensational character. A good many bills, the majority of them receipted, from tradesmen for the most part in the neighbourhood ; the coal merchant at Paignhamstead — dated some years back— butcher, village baker, caretakers' memoranda and accounts. Also a few legal-looking documents connected with leases, or other matters. Nothing at all, so far as I could see, that would be likely to suggest any sort of clue, and no trace of packet or parcel that could ever have enclosed the missing emeralds.

But naturally a more careful investigation might reveal something of value, as Diana continued to impress upon me, and I had had every intention of tackling the job in earnest the moment we succeeded in getting a little peace and quiet.

I wondered when the inspector was going to report progress again. Time was getting on and the official eye appeared almost to have gone to sleep. It was possible I might find him at the house.

But High Oaks was as deserted as the terrace. The silence, heavy and ominous, that seemed to hang over the place remained unbroken as I let myself in at the front door and glanced round the hall. The Chinaman struck an incongruous note, and seemed to leer at me from his sombre corner.

The figure was carved in wood, with a long thin drooping moustache and pigtail made of horsehair, and clothed completely in the dress of his native land. I wondered if Diana and her friend in their zeal had searched those folds of jade green silk and heavy embroidery for the jewels which they were so eager to find—and which Bertram Goodlake was so unlikely to have placed there.

I ought not to have been surprised to find the place empty, for Diana had not asked me for the key, and no one could get into the house without it. They might have been going on with their investigations outside, but there was neither sight nor sound of them.

I hardly knew whether to be pleased or otherwise at having the place to myself; for some reason I was all on edge. The loneliness came over me again, which was absurd, considering the number of years I had spent alone in my life. It was natural for Diana and Peter to go off together; youth calls to youth and they had been more or less friends since childhood. I wondered if they were tramping the countryside together, or tearing round in Peter's car without any particular objective in view, just for the joy of rushing through the soft summer air. And then I deliberately turned my mind in other directions—where was Albinia?—in her room probably, recovering from her encounter with Diana at the luncheon table; and Mrs. Vaughan—but I didn't take any interest in Mrs. Vaughan, with her long nose and immaculate gloves and shoes and generally artificial air.

I laughed at myself for a fool, and turned to the garden scene on the easel, emblem of peace and

sweet-scented sunshine and all that soothes the restless, fretful heart of man, before crossing to the corner where the writing-table stood with its vivid contrast in subtle suggestion.

The swivel chair had been removed. As a matter of fact, I had let Dawkins have it. His stolid imagination remained unmoved by gruesome associations; he had accepted it without hesitation and taken it away, presumably to adorn his living-room, for I felt sure his wife would refuse to allow any sentimental nonsense built on unpleasant memories to interfere with the acquisition of so desirable a piece of furniture.

In my opinion this callous indifference to the grimness of its past was incidentally a testimony to his innocence. In spite of all the inspector might say, I did not believe, had his been the hand that committed the murder, that either he or his wife could have endured that silent reminder as companion for the remainder of their lives. But then I could not have borne the sight of it anyhow. Innocent or guilty, I should never have wished to see it again, tainted as it was with tragedy; so, as the inspector pointed out, my personal feelings in the matter were nothing to go by.

I drew a casual chair to the writing-table and unlocked a drawer. The broken locks had not yet been repaired, but I had packed away the papers the drawers had contained, and that bore evidence of having been turned over rapidly and discarded, in those of which the locks had been left intact. The visitor had undoubtedly been disturbed before he was through with the search, or all the drawers would have been wrecked and the contents scat-

tered. Assuming for a moment the caretaker to be innocent, how annoyed the intruder must have been at Dawkins's return! He must have cursed viciously at the sound of his heavy footsteps crossing the hall; must, in fact, have cursed his own haste in perpetrating the deed for, had he waited a short time longer, Dawkins would have left the premises for good and all. Once Bertram Goodlake's dead body had been found in the library all further chance for robbery had gone, and the crime been committed fruitlessly.

Unless, of course, the emeralds—or, in my opinion, the "clue" rather than the jewels—had been in one of those rifled drawers, and the criminal had got away with it. That, though unlikely, was possible.

The papers were mostly fastened together in bundles; some of them were loose, and were fairly free from dust, owing no doubt to the fact that the detective had already gone through them and examined them carefully in the hope of finger-prints. That hope we knew had been frustrated by the thief by wearing gloves, and the only prints found had been identified as those of my cousin. But although already examined by the inspector, I still hoped to find some reference of a family nature that would be outside Drewsbury's knowledge, and that might lead to the discovery of the mysterious clue referred to in the letters.

A name, of person or place, a memorandum, even a date might possibly prove a signpost to his own kin which to the official mind would mean nothing.

Anyway it had to be done, and I set myself to the task in earnest.

I suppose any man brought up with the usual traditions shrinks instinctively from prying into another man's papers, however firmly established his right may be to do so. Though the other be dead and gone there is an "atmosphere," an influence of some kind that hangs over his possessions, protesting mutely against the violation of secrets, the meddling of alien hands with private affairs.

Such trifles may reveal so much, an entry in a diary, an old forgotten letter, even a bill can tell a story, and the worst of it is it may be distorted in the telling into a false representation of the real facts. I handled the papers reluctantly, flotsam and jetsam of a man's life, glancing at their contents and replacing them in some sort of order.

There was nothing much in the two first drawers I tackled. Mostly receipts, dry records of dealings with tradesmen in different quarters of the globe. An old pass-book or two, and innumerable bundles of used cheque-books, the counterfoils in them, records of cheques paid out to firms or private individuals in England, Monte Carlo, Rio, Madeira, California, New York; a diary of his movements in themselves, and no doubt deposited at High Oaks as a sort of dumping ground for unwanted documents.

Two of the entries referred evidently to the yearly subscription paid to a well-known Royal Society, of which I had not known him to be a member. My heart quailed as I opened a third drawer and saw more counterfoils, more bills, more receipts and bundles of papers. So far I had come across no private letters. There was just sufficient prospect

of a possible find to make an examination of these records imperative, with enough probability of such a result to give it an interest.

I flicked over the " stubs " in the cheque-books, pausing here and there as a familiar name caught my eye ; here and there a Paignhamstead tradesman figured, or a London firm that I recognized. The payment of a subscription to a well-known club brought a smile to my face as I wondered how often he had been within its doors, of late years at all events, and there were a number of payments to a Robert Yates—probably a caretaker who had preceded Dawkins, to judge by the regularity of the dates of payment.

One or two to M. Durande caught my eye, not for large amounts but paid with a certain amount of regularity.

Why, I don't know, but these counterfoils bearing unfamiliar names set me wondering if there had ever been a romance in his life. I could hardly picture that dried-up, sardonic old specimen of crusty bachelorhood under the thrall of any of the softer emotions ; and yet the artist in him might have responded in some measure to a less material side of life.

Anyway it didn't seem worth speculating about—there was nothing even to hint at it among the payments—and I was on the point of flinging a sorted bundle back into the drawer and closing it when I noticed the last two or three counterfoils in the lot I was handling were almost indecipherable, having apparently been stained and disfigured through contact with some liquid. The blue printing ink had run, mingled with the black used by my

cousin, with the result that the name of the payee and the date were almost obliterated.

The letters "elm" caught my attention and linking it idly with the name of the house, I wondered why "oak" had been changed to "elm". I was not much interested—after going through some hundreds of such counterfoils, leading to nothing, one's attention is apt to wander, and it was a moment before I recollected that the letters formed part of the name of the payee, not the address. There could be no connexion between "elm" and "oak".

I looked at it more carefully. The closer scrutiny revealed a D before the "elm", and with that slight assistance along the line of association, I awoke to the fact that the name partly obscured by the purplish discoloration was Delmico.

And then a shadow fell across me from the window. I dropped the bunch of counterfoils into the drawer and locked it, as Peter Lanham stepped into the room.

CHAPTER XIV

PETER walked round the room, put a cigarette between his lips, drew a match-box from his pocket, struck a match, blew it out without lighting the cigarette, and walked round the room again.

I recognized the symptoms.

"If you go buzzing round like that you'll get giddy," I observed, and he sat down.

He had arrived at a most inopportune moment, and I may be excused for a natural irritation.

"It's all very fine," he said slowly, "but there *is* something to be said for brains!" and he stared gloomily at the carpet.

"If *you* are going to say it, perhaps you'll put it as briefly as possible," I remarked. "I am sure it will be very interesting, but I am rather busy."

I lit a cigar and waited. This, I supposed, was the outcome of Diana's intention to write a book!

"I have wasted an awful lot of time in my life," he went on, taking out the match-box again; "thrown away hours and hours when I might have been—have been—well, not wasting it," he finished feebly.

"I shouldn't allow remorse to eat away your young life on that account," I replied. "The worm in the bud is all very well in poetry, but it's better to save it up for old age in real life. What's the matter?"

He looked at me reproachfully, struck another match and watched it burn down till it nearly reached his finger.

"What I mean is," he began, applying what was left of it to the cigarette, "I wish I had done things more worth while."

The flame having succeeded in reaching his finger, he threw it on the floor, put his foot on it and regarded sadly the slightly blackened end of the cigarette.

"I wish you would light that thing!" I said curtly. "If it isn't one of the things that are worth while why not put it away and be done with it? You'll be setting the place on fire directly."

He was putting me on edge, which may have betrayed itself in my voice. I wanted to be alone to think out the meaning of that counterfoil. He drew out another match, set the cigarette alight in earnest, and started to walk about again.

"You see what I mean?" he asked as I sat back in my chair and watched him.

I didn't, and said so.

"You haven't made yourself very clear about what you mean by 'worth while'," I added. "There is your job, for instance. Is the worthwhileness to be measured by the amount of your salary? A job's a job, and presumably always worth doing."

He brightened at that.

"You really think so? My particular job doesn't want a lot of brains; it's pretty well all right so long as you can read and write. I have never done anything that wants what you call—intellect—never written a book, for instance."

"You have done something for humanity then," I said dryly. I was on the right tack apparently in supposing he and Diana had been discussing the pros and cons of the new detective novel during the afternoon. Well, why shouldn't they? "But don't imagine intellect and the making of books go necessarily hand in hand. You have only got to read some of them to know that."

Peter, however, was not listening. He went off at a tangent.

"Women are uncertain creatures—you never know how to take 'em!" he said, harking back to his original theme. He seated himself on the edge of the table and stared in front of him.

"I have heard it said our own sex is not always to be depended upon," I replied, wishing he would unburden himself of whatever was on his chest and go. He was confiding in me in exactly the same strain as he did in bygone days when he and Diana had fallen out, and I was beginning to resent it. The situation was changed, and he ought to understand as much. He was welcome to scour the country with my wife, or spend the afternoon as I guessed they had, under the trees on the lawn discussing the book Diana was proposing to write; but it struck me forcibly by his manner—I knew the symptoms of old—that he was still more or less in love with her, and it was a bit thick to come to me for either advice or consolation in the circumstances!

"They expect so much of a chap," he went on, "the life-is-real-life-is-earnest sort of stunt. It's all very well to talk about living for humanity, but you've got your work cut out these days to live at

all! Humanity can jolly well look after itself! That's how I feel about it."

"Then why don't you tell her so?" I laughed.

He smiled in a shamefaced sort of way.

"You seem to have been getting a bit of a lecture," I added.

"Not exactly a lecture," he objected, "but it makes a chap think."

"I should do it gradually if I were you—increase the dose slightly every day sort of thing. Any sudden strain may result in——"

"Oh, don't rag!" he broke in, flinging himself into the chair again.

"——Convulsions, coma, and sudden death," I finished. I don't know where I got hold of the phrase, but it seemed to come readily to the tongue.

In a moment Peter was on his feet again.

"Look here, I am in dead earnest! It's pretty serious to be suddenly awakened to the fact that you have been playing the silly goat instead of——" he hesitated, and I finished the sentence for him.

"Improving the shining hour? But it's easily remedied. I don't see why you want to write a book about it."

"I don't want to write a book specially about that," he protested.

"There are so many ways of serving humanity besides writing books—even detective novels," I went on, "but as I don't quite understand what you're driving at I daresay I'm not being very helpful. Are you proposing to start on a literary career?—and has the uncertainty of women anything to do with it? Diana has not begun hers yet, I believe. She is what is called collecting material."

He seated himself on the edge of the table and threw his cigarette end into the waste-paper basket. The contents immediately began to smoulder. I smothered the incipient conflagration with a flat paper-weight lying on the writing-table.

"I don't know if Paignhamstead has a fire brigade," I began, "but if you propose to remain here for any length of time I'll see about re-insuring the house—a detail possibly neglected by my late cousin."

"Sorry," Peter said absently, but, judging from externals, his remorse was not going to affect his appetite.

"A woman can have a great effect on a man's life——" he continued.

"Adam found that out in the Garden of Eden," I interposed, "it isn't a new idea." I was in no mood to have platitudes dumped on me, but he went on as solemnly as though he had invented it himself:

"I mean even if she is altogether out of his reach. She is something to live up to—gives him a standard."

Even the woman's husband could have no objection to such lofty sentiments. I made none.

"The worst of it is one is always putting one's foot in it," he grumbled. "You never know where you are. Now you've had a lot of experience—with women I mean—Judy Beauclerk told me you did her an awfully good turn once, and there was Betty—"

"Look here!" I interposed impatiently, "I am busy. If you've got anything to say, for the Lord's sake out with it and let me get on with my business! If your idea is to do something worth while you

must read a bit and study and think things out. You can't go suddenly off the deep end like that—if you want to write a book you have got to have something to write about."

"I didn't say I wanted to write a book—I said I admired anybody who did."

"Well, it isn't written yet, and by the time it is you may be admiring something else. I don't mean to be unsympathetic,"—he looked rather hurt, and frowned—"you and Diana once tried to write a play which wasn't altogether a success, if you remember. Men and women take such opposite views of life."

"It's better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all," Peter murmured—and that was the last straw!

"Look here!" I said, rising from my chair at the sound of a footstep in the hall: "You are getting what Diana would call soppy, and I haven't the time for that sort of thing. If fewer people tried to write books it would be all the better for the world at large, in my opinion. There *are* other ways of being clever, you know. Where is Diana, by the by? I was expecting her to join me here."

Peter stared at me dreamily.

"I don't know," he answered at last.

I was taken aback. I had taken for granted she had come with him and was somewhere about outside.

"You don't know?" I began, "——but——"

"I haven't seen her since luncheon," he added, "—gone off somewhere with that fellow Farjohn, I expect."

And I had been fancying the two of them spend-

ing the afternoon together in some shady spot in the hotel grounds! I frankly confess the sunshine seemed a little brighter for the moment.

Not that I had really been worried, but life plays funny tricks, and Peter had been associated with Diana during childhood, and they were both young —younger than I was by many years. I suppose, too, a certain sensitiveness about my lame foot didn't tend to give me confidence; it would never cease to fill me with amazement that so radiant a creature as Diana should have been willing to link her life with mine.

Interruption appeared to be the order of the day. Before I had recovered from my surprise at Peter's remark, Mrs. Vaughan walked into the room.

She nodded to Peter, took no notice of me—I don't think she really liked me—and dropped into a chair.

"I thought Diana was here," she remarked, and removing her hat and a glove—pulling it off her fingers and running her hand through the opening in the long gauntlet as women do—patted the curl on either side of her face as if to encourage them to further effort, and looked from me to Peter.

"Well, she isn't," Peter said, returning the glance gloomily. I shook my head.

"Diana has not been here this afternoon. I have been rather busy, looking over some of my cousin's private papers," and I turned to the writing-table, hoping my visitors might take the hint and remove themselves elsewhere.

But Peter rose from his perch on the edge of the table and began walking about again, and Mrs. Vaughan lit a cigarette.

"I am taking an afternoon off," she laughed. "Diana is a perfect slave-driver when she is playing the sleuth, but she has gone off somewhere with that man Farjohn."

"You have been very kind in helping us in what seems to be a useless search," I interposed hastily, before the mention of Diana's defection set Peter off again on the instability of the female sex. "I wish Bertram Goodlake hadn't been so addicted to crossword puzzles," I added, "and given us the facts in plain English."

"It would have saved a lot of trouble. It must be a bore to have to go through other people's papers; I suppose you have any amount of them still?"

"Drawerfuls," I replied tersely.

"They seem all asleep at the hotel," she went on, "and won't wake up till tea-time, I expect. Except the highbrow girl, Miss Lorne; she's writing in the drawing-room, and Dr. Delmico is analysing some of his own dreams on the sofa in the smoking-room. I wish him joy of them."

Peter paused in his perambulations and looked at his wrist-watch.

"It's getting on," he said. "I'd no idea it was so late," and with a nod he drifted into the hall while I congratulated myself on having at all events got rid of one of them!

"I am beginning to think we shan't recognize it when we find it," Mrs. Vaughan remarked, tucking a leather-covered cushion into the back of the chair for her further comfort in a way that augured ill for a speedy departure.

"Shan't recognize what?" I asked.

"The 'clue'—that we're all looking for, of course."

"Oh, that!" I replied; my hopes with regard to that elusive will o' the wisp were diminishing. "I have come across a name or two among the papers that may possibly give the police something to start on—they will probably lead to nothing, but one never knows." Then as my visitor made no reply, I added, "You don't know anything about the man they call the professor, do you—Dr. Delmico?"

Her eyebrows lifted. She looked at me curiously.

"Know anything about him? In what way?"

"Where he comes from—and so on. Has he always lived in England?"

She laughed merrily.

"My dear man," she retorted, "why on earth should I know? I never set eyes on him till I came to this hotel, and I don't suppose I shall ever see him again when I leave it—and I shan't cry my eyes out at that!" she added. "He's a moth-eaten sort of individual!"

I could agree with her there. It was difficult to imagine anyone wanting to see Dr. Delmico again! But after that counterfoil I intended to learn something more about him somehow.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked, curiosity evidently aroused.

I hesitated. I had no wish to confide in her.

"On general principles," I replied, "one wants to know all there is to be known about everyone when confronted by this sort of problem."

She nodded and sat forward in the chair.

"I suppose so—though I should hardly think

the Delmico man likely to yield anything worth while in the field of inquiry. I'll try and probe into his past," she laughed and, to my great relief, rose, " —ask him what he dreams about—and why he calls himself doctor."

" For heaven's sake don't do anything of the sort ! " I protested ; with Albinia dogging Farjohn and Mrs. Vaughan trailing Delmico the hotel would get too hot to hold one—and heaven knows what Diana wasn't doing. " You may be sure the police have got his dossier all right, and so far as I know there's nothing against the man."

" Except that you have come across his name among those papers," she retorted. " I am not all a fool, Mr. Goodlake, whatever you may think of me, and can put two and two together as well as most people ! Fortunately I am not so inquisitive as most of my sex are reputed to be, or I wouldn't let you off so easily ! " And with a wave of a long, slim hand, the *suède* glove dangling from the wrist, she was gone.

With the Doxology in my heart I turned to the writing-table.

Mrs. Vaughan was certainly quick at the uptake. I had not meant to give away the fact of my discovery of Delmico's name, but as it did not really matter—I had been careless and allowed her to draw more inferences than I had intended—I only hoped she would say nothing foolish, and make mischief. There was nothing at all against the man so far, only it was odd if he had dealings of any sort with my cousin that he had never mentioned it.

I reopened the drawer and picked out the bunch

of counterfoils. The one in which I was interested was third from the end, following the form of application for a new cheque-book. At the studio end of the room I had noticed a fair-sized magnifying glass lying on a bracket fixed against the wall. I crossed the room to fetch it and armed with this aid to more detailed scrutiny, I examined the purplish stain where the coloured inks had run into one another.

There was no doubt about the name under the lens. The big D had suffered, but was still discernible ; the initial or initials in front of it were quite wiped out by the invading liquid. The "elm" stood out fairly clearly ; the three last letters had only just escaped extinction.

The date of the month was indecipherable, but the year was 1925, and the bank, the England and Counties Bank, Westminster Branch.

The amount for which the cheque had been drawn was entirely obliterated, swallowed completely by the miniature flood that had wrought destruction within its own tiny limits.

I stared at the discoloured bit of paper, wondering what it might have told of transactions in the past—what perhaps it *was* telling me as I gazed—telling me with all its might, and my brain too thick or too slow to understand.

What, I speculated, had been the nature of the invading fluid ? Nothing very sinister or suggestive ; I could tell that much. Plain water, perhaps, innocent of evil intent, but in that room, with a mind tuned to the grim note of crime and a recollection of the ominously instructive stain on the blotting-pad, I found it hard to be-

lieve that nothing but pure water had wrought the havoc.

Yet if the discoloration had been deliberate and with intent to destroy, why not have removed the tell-tale bit of paper altogether, or burnt the bundle of counterfoils? I called myself to task for silly fancies. There was probably some quite simple explanation, but before taxing Dr. Delmico with conduct not entirely straightforward it would be necessary to be a bit more sure of one's ground.

I determined to pay a visit to the Westminster Branch of the England and Counties Bank without delay.

CHAPTER XV

I RETURNED to the hotel. Diana was having tea on the lawn with Farjohn; Albinia watching them from a chair on the terrace. I asked what had become of the rest of the party.

Albinia removed her eyes reluctantly from the pair under the tree and turned them to myself.

"Goodness knows!" she replied. "I have waited tea for you, Humphrey—as nobody else appears to be doing so," and her eyes turned again towards the lawn.

I refused to rise to the bait and left the innuendo unnoticed.

"Why should anyone wait tea for me?" I asked. "Have you ordered it?"

"I told them to bring it out at five o'clock if I didn't ring sooner, so it will be here in a few minutes." Then, after a slight pause, during which I drew a table within reach and seated myself opposite to her: "How long are you going to stand that sort of thing, Humphrey?"

"What sort of thing?" I asked, hackles up instantly. It was astonishing how irritating that sister of mine could be! No wonder Diana could not resist playing the devil sometimes! She moved a shoulder impatiently.

"You know quite well what I mean! If it's nothing to you that everyone in the hotel should

be set talking, that's your business! But what I am surprised at is that you should allow your wife to associate herself with a man who may turn out to be *anything!*—and probably *is!* You may find yourself in a very unpleasant position."

I smiled.

"What do you think he is likely to turn out to be? What do you mean exactly by *anything?*"

"It's all very well to be sarcastic," she went on, "but I know what I am talking about. While you and Diana have shut yourselves up with that woman, at High Oaks—there is far too much lipstick and face powder about her for my taste, not to mention the stuff she puts on her handkerchief—looking for something that isn't there, I have been keeping an open eye elsewhere, and I can tell you——" but fortunately at this moment the tea arrived; prudence placed a check on Albinia's tongue, and before the man, after placing the tray on the table, disappeared into the house, Dr. Delmico—if he were really entitled to the prefix—sauntered round the corner from the front of the house and paused before passing on.

I looked him up and down with more attention than I had so far bestowed upon him.

There seemed to be a trace of foreign blood in his dark eyes and the sort of beard not worn in this country since a previous generation. His shoulders were narrow, and he looked more lithe than muscularly strong. A nose, though inclined to be hooked, was characteristic of no particular nation, and except for a roll in his r's and a little difficulty with aspirates, there was nothing much beyond his name to label him in any way un-English. To

say I didn't like him was to overstate the case; until I had found the name among those counterfoils I had taken no sort of interest in him either way.

"Haven't found the clue yet, I suppose?" he remarked cheerfully.

His tone piqued me. There was no special reason why he should suppose anything of the kind.

"I am not sure." I helped myself to bread and butter and watched him covertly to see how he took it. "Things seem to be getting a bit warmer. I shouldn't be surprised if something were to turn up before long."

He peered at me slantwise from beneath shaggy eyebrows. What I really thought about him I hardly knew myself; nothing definite or clear-cut at that time, I am sure. Vague suspicions drifting across my field of thought like wisps of mist on an early autumn morning.

"Time it did, isn't it?" I fancied I could detect the hint of a sneer in his voice, but it might well have been imagination. "The police don't seem to be getting much of a move on! And I don't blame them. When they have nothing better than a lunatic to deal with, as I believe to be the case here, there's nothing to get hold of—no jumping-off ground, as you might say. You can't argue along the usual psychological lines, because there aren't any."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, with the usual criminal you look round for the motive—gives a sort of peg to hang your theories on; but there's no peg to hang anything

on when it comes to lunatics—no line of action for the police to foresee—no logical conclusions to be drawn. Chaos—that's what it is—a chaos of unreason." He paused here, apparently pleased with the phrase, and I watched his short, square beard stop waggling with a sort of fascination, and then start again as he finished: "And on top of it all a lunatic can be as cunning as the devil when it comes to hiding his tracks!"

"There's been no lunatic at work over this business!" Albinia broke in, pouring water into the teapot and shutting the lid with a snap. "You forget my cousin's letter about the secretary. Besides, this mad creature you are talking about has been shut up at Paignhamstead for over three years, so, even if Bertram Goodlake had been cracked enough to have had a lunatic for a secretary, it couldn't have been this one." She flung a triumphant glance at Delmico. "The inspector told me that. The police may not know much, but they do find out things of that sort."

She paused, possibly from want of breath. I looked across at Diana and her companion, so immersed in their own conversation, and wondered if there could be anything in what Albinia had said. It is almost impossible to regard one's fellow creatures impartially in an atmosphere of suspicion such as we had been living in. Much as I should dislike it, I felt I must put a few searching questions to Albinia to find out if there could be any real foundation for her dark innuendoes.

In the meantime I deliberately shifted my chair round till I was sitting back to the lawn. I did not wish to appear to be watching them; also they

were so obviously contented with their own society that I felt a bit out of it—which was ridiculous.

Delmico was speaking.

"That," he said slowly, "does not preclude the possibility of the lunatic's guilt with regard to the murder. He was known to have been at large about the hour it was committed, and with a man of deranged mind to prove opportunity is to prove half your case." Again he seemed pleased with his own phraseology, and repeated the sentence.

The conversation was futile. Had the case against the mad chap been proven all Delmico said might have been to the point. As matters stood it did not get us any farther. I did not for a moment accept the idea of his guilt; there was more against than in favour of it. His possession of the keys had been more or less explained; and no explanation of how he might by any possibility have possessed himself of a weapon had been forthcoming. The so-called evidence against him was all moonshine. I dismissed the professor's hints as worthless.

More than one question hovered on my lips; leading questions about his past life, the countries in which he had travelled, and so on; but something held me back. It would probably have led to nothing and I thought it wiser to wait until I had gone farther into the matter of the counterfoil at the England and Counties Bank. One's natural instincts, too, shrank, while professing friendliness, from probing into a man's private affairs in order to use any knowledge so attained against him. It was all very well to talk of a flair for sleuthing, but it struck me as requiring a very special training in

more ways than one to do it successfully. Once one's blood was up, either for reasons of revenge or in order to see justice done, it might be a different matter; my feelings with regard to my cousin's murderer were quite sufficiently sharpset to goad me to any lengths towards his detection. Brought face to face with him, the ties of blood would be strong enough to make me "see red," and become a relentless avenger of his death, dealt by a coward's hand in the dark.

But I must be sure of my ground first. To poke and probe in cold blood into what it was quite possible did not concern me—a man's private life—was another affair, and in any case would probably be useless. As he had seen fit to be silent with regard to an acquaintance or dealings with Bertram Goodlake, indicated by the name in the cheque-book, he was not likely to give himself away to me.

"Where is Peter?" I asked, looking at Albinia.

"How should I know?" she returned. "If, as I conclude, you mean Mr. Lanham, I saw him slinking away from the winter gardens shortly before you came in. Off on some sleuthing of his own, I fancy." Albinia seemed to like the word, and used it on every possible occasion.

I smiled. Possibly the sight of Diana seated with Farjohn on the lawn had had a disturbing effect on him.

"I can't see Peter 'slinking,'" I objected. "He generally goes about more like a steam engine than a sleuth-hound. He may have been trying to avoid someone. As for sleuthing, as you call it

everyone seems to be sleuthing everybody else! It's a jolly atmosphere!"

"One doesn't expect much jollity about a murder," Albinia protested.

Delmico laughed and, to my great relief, moved off along the terrace.

"Here is Diana—had enough of Mr. Farjohn for the moment apparently," she finished.

I turned to greet her as she came up the steps. She laid a hand lightly on my shoulder as she passed to a chair and sat down between us.

"You seem very much taken up with that young man!" Albinia observed.

"It's not for you to say that!" the other answered lightly. "You hardly ever let him out of your sight. I saw you stalking him this morning at the edge of the wood. So did he."

My sister had the grace to blush.

"I have my reasons," she said stiffly. "You will be very sorry some day at having allowed him to be so familiar."

"When a man has picked up a marmalade spoon for you—sticky all up the handle—things can never be quite the same between you again," Diana said gravely. "Barriers seem broken down—lines of defence. You know what I mean, Albinia."

"I know nothing of the sort," was the curt retort. "It would take more than a marmalade spoon—sticky or otherwise—to break down barriers with me! The present generation don't seem to have any barriers. They break every rule of decent behaviour!"

"We have no rules nowadays," Diana replied, lighting a cigarette and dropping the flaming

match on the gravel; Albinia extended a foot and extinguished it ostentatiously. "Rules were the bane of the Victorian era!"

"As you weren't alive in the Victorian era you can't know much about it," Albinia snapped.

"I judge by some of the relics left over by the last century—in the way of rules, I mean," Diana added, looking at Albinia innocently. "The young people of to-day refuse to obey them."

"They do just what they like!" my sister remarked.

"Which if you think of it makes life much more interesting, because you never know what anybody is going to do next," Diana went on. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Farjohn has been giving me some hints for my detective novel," and she blew a filmy trail of smoke into the still evening air.

In a moment Albinia saw her chance, and took it.

"If it was from the criminal's point of view——" she began, but I thought it time to intervene.

"I hope he has told you the murder must be done in the first or second chapter?" I said hastily. "Then if you make Scotland Yard always come out second-best you can't go far wrong."

"My book is going to be on quite new lines," Diana replied. "Where's Peter? I haven't seen him for hours."

"Peter is throwing himself into the chase con amore," I remarked. "He is sleuthing somewhere on his own. He generally is, it seems, but as he hasn't confided in me I can't tell you his particular line."

The following day I ran up to London in the car

and paid a visit to the bank in Westminster, taking the bunch of counterfoils in my pocket. I was not quite sure what exactly I expected to gain from it. There was just a chance that the cheque might have been cashed over the counter, and the clerk might be able to give a recognizable description of the man who had presented it, and so establish a link between my cousin and the so-called professor.

Even that would tell us very little ; there would no doubt be a plausible explanation forthcoming on the part of Delmico. The suppression of the fact that he had known Bertram Goodlake would certainly justify suspicion against him, and if I should be fortunate enough to unearth anything informative I should immediately put it into Drewsbury's hands.

The young man behind the counter was quite ready to give me any information he could, but I preferred to see the manager. I had had correspondence with the bank on account of a small sum the dead man had remaining there to his credit, and in the course of a few minutes I found myself seated in a partitioned-off cubicle opposite a short, stout man with a fringe of red hair encircling a very bald head, and a pleasant smile.

" Ah," he remarked when I produced the counterfoils and explained my errand, " you are not the first to come here on the same quest ! "

I was surprised and showed it.

" Do you mean the man who calls himself Dr. Delmico has been making inquiries ? "

He shook his head.

" I know nothing about Delmico," he replied, running his fingers over the counterfoils. " It was

the police I was referring to. A man from Scotland Yard, in charge of the case he said he was, was here a few days after the—er—regrettable incident of your cousin's death. As the point in question was investigated at the time, I am in a position to give you all the information available. Which isn't much, I'm afraid."

So the inspector had been before me! Of course, when I came to think of it, he had had the run of all the private papers, and had doubtless spotted the name on the counterfoil. Inspector Drewsbury certainly gave nothing away!

He must have gone through those old bank-books and tradesmen's receipts with a fine comb, as they say, in half the time it had taken me; found Delmico's name, and connected it with the visitor at the hotel.

I felt a slight natural resentment that he should have taken me so little into his confidence, but anyway he showed that he was following up all the side tracks, and that the police were not quite so apathetic as Diana supposed.

"The cheque seems to have been made out in favour of a man of that name and in South America," the manager went on. "As you will see by the date, it was some time ago, and the cashier who must have dealt with it, thinks he cashed it over the counter, and has a vague recollection of a tall, thin, clean-shaven man presenting it."

Evidently not Delmico himself, so the information did not go for much.

"I see. It doesn't help us much, in fact."

The manager smiled.

"So the inspector said—but it's all we can do, I'm afraid. Who or what this man Delmico is we have no idea."

He was glancing at each counterfoil in turn as he turned them, and suddenly came to a full stop.

"Durande?" he read out, frowning slightly. "That name seems to bring something to my mind, but I can't put my finger on it." He stared absently at the ground glass panel in front of him for a moment, then pressed the button of an electric bell in the wall. As he still appeared to be thinking hard, I said nothing.

"Ask Mr. Egmont to come here," he said as a boy opened the door in answer to the summons.

"Mr. Egmont," he went on as the clerk in question appeared in the doorway, "why is the name Durande sticking in my memory? Was that the name of the man mixed up with that affair in Nottingham?—you remember—last July? Surely the name was Durande—or something very like it?"

The new-comer smiled. A fair youth with shrewd blue eyes and a dimple in his chin.

"No, sir. The chap in the Nottingham case was called Adams."

The manager's somewhat official demeanour relaxed for the moment.

"A bad shot!" he laughed, glancing at me, "curious what tricks memory will play. I could have sworn the name began with 'D' and had an 'r' in it."

"Durande, if you remember, sir, was the name the late Mr. Goodlake cabled about. We were to stop any cheque presented in that name. He

cabled from somewhere in South America only a few weeks ago."

The manager nodded quickly.

"I remember now—of course it was. We concluded somebody had been taking liberties with his cheque-book. We were to stop any cheque made payable to that name. But nothing came of it, I think?"

"The cheque was never presented so nothing further transpired."

"When exactly did we receive the cable?"

With a muttered: "One moment, sir," Mr. Egmont vanished.

"Got a head on his shoulders," the manager observed, adding with a whimsical twist of lip, "and he generally carries all the necessary dates in it. Well?" as the clerk reappeared in the doorway.

"We received the cable on July 15," Mr. Egmont replied. "Mr. Goodlake must have sent it off shortly before he himself left for England."

"Have you got any ideas on the subject?"

Mr. Egmont raised his eyebrows.

"Durande may have stolen a blank cheque from Mr. Goodlake's cheque-book—one of our own evidently, though we were by no means the only bank at which he had an account—started for England and hoped to get away with it before the owner of the cheque-book discovered his loss. Why it was never presented remains a mystery—Got cold feet when it came to the point, and lucky for him he did!"

The manager looked at me.

"I am afraid that's all we can do for you," he said.

I conveyed my thanks to Mr. Egmont who promptly disappeared.

"Nothing doing. I am sorry I can't help you," the manager remarked.

"It may be you have," I rejoined. "As a matter of fact, it was Delmico I was after. I know nothing about this Durande, beyond an occasional entry of the name on the counterfoils."

"Just so. The police were concentrating on Delmico too. There was nothing said about Durande, but as I happened to notice the name among these records," he tapped the bunch of counterfoils as he returned them to me, "I thought I might as well recall the details of the incident connected with the name."

"I am very much obliged to you," I said as we parted. "One never can tell what may or may not be of use in a case of this sort, and I will pass on what you have told me to Scotland Yard—although they may possibly know it already!" I added with a short laugh.

I could understand how the inspector had been caught by the name he recognized just as I had been. "Delmico," would of course have arrested his attention, whereas "Durande" would convey nothing to either of us, any more than Yates or any other of the names appearing among the counterfoils. I smiled in a mild satisfaction that Drewsbury had been caught more or less in his own toils. He had been a little too reticent with the manager of the England and Counties Bank.

Had I not handed over to the latter the bundle of counterfoils openly for his inspection, I, too, might have remained ignorant of any significance

in the name Durande. As matters turned out, my visit to the bank had not been entirely in vain.

But at the moment it seemed to have been pretty futile, especially as Scotland Yard apparently had already been over the ground. I felt that had the inspector been a little more frank with me with regard to his inquiries, I might have been saved what seemed at the time a fruitless journey; but I supposed the Yard would continue to work along its own lines and traditions to the end of time.

Also—was the pot perhaps calling the kettle black?

Had *I* been entirely frank with the inspector? If I had informed him of my intentions, no doubt he would have told me I might save myself the trouble as he had already made investigations at the bank, and my wild-goose chase, as I considered it, would never have taken place—also I should never have heard of the cable sent by my cousin to the England and Counties Bank.

CHAPTER XVI

I RETURNED to Paignhamstead and on the following afternoon the inspector came to report progress.

"Is that what he calls it?" Diana remarked when a page brought me the message.

I was on the point of starting for High Oaks so I went out to the front doorsteps to meet him, and we turned together down the hotel drive and walked up the road towards the house.

"So you have picked up the Delmico trail?" I said dryly. "Got ahead of me. May I be allowed to ask what you make of it?"

He threw me one of the sidelong glances I was becoming accustomed to and smiled apologetically.

"You mustn't take offence, sir. I know it's your business, but when it comes to murder it's equally the Yard's business. We must work on our own methods to get at the truth regardless of what anybody thinks. Owe it to the country. There's too many fingers in this pie. There's Mrs. Goodlake—you'll pardon me, sir—not inclined to help the police—off on her own——"

"She wants to write a detective novel, and calls it getting experience," I interposed. "You mustn't take it too seriously, Inspector."

"Doesn't matter what it's called. Scotland Yard isn't there to help young ladies write detective

novels," he rejoined with a touch of irritation. "Then there's Mrs. Vaughan giving out the lunatic from the Paignhamstead Home did it—she'll find herself in Queer Street if she lets her tongue wag so much—even lunatics have rights of a sort—and hunting for clues, she is, instead of leaving it to the police. And now I hear there's a young gentleman come down from London, leaving his own business to look after itself, and mixing himself up in other people's—though from what I hear——" he paused abruptly, and there was an expression in his keen blue eye I resented.

"Yes?" I said coldly, "Mr. Lanham I suppose you mean?"

"Old friend of Mrs. Goodlake's, isn't he?" he asked tentatively.

"I don't see what that has to do with it," I returned shortly, "he isn't likely to do any harm from your point of view."

"And then," he finished, leaving the subject of Peter Lanham, "there is Miss Goodlake, and she—well sir—I asked you to give her a hint—!"

"You certainly don't seem to appreciate her efforts," I replied.

"Nor, I fancy, does the gentleman upon whom they are directed," he said meaningly. "People won't stand too much of that sort of thing."

"Where is all this leading to?"

"I am showing you what we have to contend with. Everyone drawing their own red herring across the trail, regardless of how they may be adding to our difficulties. No wonder we keep what we know to ourselves!"

I had to admit I saw his point.

"But about this fellow Delmico," I persisted, "the doctor—so-called. You noted his name on that stained counterfoil, so the manager of the England and Counties Bank told me, and followed it up. Did it lead you anywhere?"

"Nothing doing!" was the answer. "The name caught my eye first time I turned over those papers—smeared with ink as it was—don't know why—because it was a name I knew, I suppose—and I set inquiries on foot. There is a Spanish flavour about it, and we cabled the police at Buenos Aires, and Rio—knowing Mr. Goodlake had frequented those parts—asking a few leading questions. Result——"

"Yes?" I said again; it seemed information was only to be extracted with a corkscrew, and I was keenly interested.

"People of the name of Delmico—common as gooseberries in Rio, we were told—answers to Smith or Jones in this country—not much to go on in that. Then Superintendent Aylmers of the Yard had a bright idea. Mr. Goodlake was given to painting—well, the chances were he ran out of paints now and then—was there an artist-colourman, name of Delmico in Rio?—or if it came to that, any sort of tradesman with whom he may have dealt?"

"Which would account for the cheque and let the professor here out?" I suggested.

"Just so. We cabled again, on the off-chance of getting any peg to hang further inquiry upon, and got an answer. There was more than one tradesman called Delmico, it seemed—but the only one among them who recognized the name Good-

lake, was a small artists' colourman somewhere on the edge of the city. So the superintendent's shot had hit the mark!"

"Good for him," I observed, as some reply was evidently expected, "and then—what?"

"It appears that he was a young man succeeded to his father's business, and he would have known nothing about it if he hadn't remembered hearing his father grumble about having received an English cheque in payment of something he had written off as a bad debt. An Englishman—name of Goodlake—had bought some painting stuff—canvas, paints, and what-not over the counter, promised to look in again and left no address. He didn't come back—and that's all there was to it. His father supposed he had forgotten—but he remembered when he got back to England, and sent the cheque on the English bank."

I nodded.

"Just the sort of thing Bertram Goodlake would have done!"

"So that lets this man out," he went on. "We looked him up—he writes books, on psychology or dreams or something—no reason at all for connecting the two. And I may tell you," he finished, "that on the night on which the murder was committed the professor was a guest at a public dinner at the Savoy, and did not return to the hotel at Paignhamstead until close on midnight. A watertight alibi."

So that was that. There had been no mention of Durande, and it seemed the moment to drop my bomb.

"My interview with the manager of the England

and Counties Bank was, however, not quite so barren of result as you might suppose," I began slowly.

He looked round at me quickly.

"In what particular, sir?" he asked in a tone that might be used towards a rather stupid child. Officialdom *is* irritating on occasion.

"Nothing to do with Delmico," I replied. "Did you ever come across the name Durande, Inspector?"

"Can't say I remember it at the moment," was the cautious answer.

"And you don't know that a cable was sent by my cousin to the bank shortly before he returned to England, safeguarding himself against possible fraud?" I went on.

"Fraud on whose part?"

"We don't know yet. I'll tell you the details."

"Why didn't the manager mention it?" he snapped. "The public seem to think——"

"I know," I interrupted gently, "but neither the manager nor anyone else had reason to mention it till the name Durande caught the manager's eye among the counterfoils I gave him to look through. Bank managers can be as reticent about their own and their clients' business as the police."

He vouchsafed no more than a dissatisfied grunt, and let me tell him the whole story, of the cable stopping the cheque, without interruption.

At the end of it he went so far as to admit it might have some bearing on the case.

"The trouble has been," he said, pocketing the bunch of counterfoils I handed over to him, "in the difficulty we have had in getting hold of any names.

Mr. Goodlake seems to have had mighty few friends, and so far the secretary has eluded us. There's been no taking-off point. Now this cable," he pinched his lower lip and stared at me with unseeing eyes as he thought the matter out in its various ramifications, "was sent, you say, very shortly before he himself left for England? To track this Durande may, in fact, have been one of the reasons for his return. Do you happen to know if he came back in a hurry, sir? Or was it in accordance with prearranged plans?"

I laughed.

"Ask me another! My cousin would never have informed me of his intentions, even if he had known them himself—which was highly improbable. He would more likely up sticks and trek on the spur of the moment. I hadn't heard from him for ages and didn't even know he was in England till I was rung up that morning by Scotland Yard and informed of his death."

The inspector continued to pinch his under-lip, and paused in the shade of a roadside elm. It was warm and I took the opportunity to light a cigar and offer one to my companion.

"You know how to choose a good smoke, sir," he smiled, "——don't often get a chance of this kind."

When we got going again he resumed the subject.

"Mr. Goodlake maybe discovered the theft of a blank cheque from his book, and having reason already to distrust this Durande—who for aught we know may have been the secretary—put a spoke in his wheel by sending off the cable."

"That was the manager's opinion," I assented. "We may conclude Durande hoped that the loss

of the cheque would not be discovered until he had time to realize on it. Then got cold feet and never presented it. That's how we read it."

"And Mr. Goodlake was probably coming home anyhow," the inspector went on.

What with the warmth of the weather, the sun pouring down upon us wherever the heavy summer foliage gave it a chance, and the fairly steep gradient of the hill, and my handicap, our pace had degenerated to a saunter. My companion inhaled the aroma of the tobacco with an air of supreme content.

"Having dispatched the cable, and knowing the bank would refuse to cash the cheque and follow up the line if it should be presented, he would have awaited further news without altering his plans."

"Durande probably knew he intended to come home. I wonder," I stared at the inspector thoughtfully, "if he has got away with the emeralds, and vanished into the blue?" and added under an urge of sharp irritation: "Damn my cousin and his clues! Why the devil couldn't he talk in plain English instead of setting us all guessing like this!"

"I'm with you there!" was the hearty response. "Not only keeps us guessing, but messes up the line and wastes valuable time while the criminal makes his get-away. Don't suppose Mr. Goodlake really thought he was going to be murdered—few people do, however they may joke about it—or he would have acted differently."

I silently acquiesced.

"For aught we know," he went on, "Durande, secretary or not, may have got into the house unknown to the caretaker before Mr. Goodlake's

arrival. Those footsteps Mrs. Dawkins says she heard in the shrubbery may have been a preliminary visit, followed by a further incursion at night. It's not a difficult house to break into ; nor would the Dawkins couple be difficult to hoodwink in the matter of hiding up tracks. Durande may have had previous knowledge of what was meant by the 'clue', and possibly, as you suggest, got at the emeralds."

"It's the devil of a tangle," I sighed.

"You're right there, sir," he gave me a sly smile, "and the amateur may have turned over a useful little stone for once !—don't say it is so, but it may be. And I'll tell you this much—only keep it to yourself—the cigarette-case, found on the path through the shrubbery, has given us a bit of a line. This name—Durande—may help us on the road and if you should come across anything further, let me know. Old bills and receipts sound arid hunting ground, but in this sort of case one never knows."

"I'll keep my eyes open," I promised.

"Miss Goodlake setting up as a private inquiry office isn't helping us," he continued. "If Farjohn should turn out to be involved in the affair she is putting him wise to our suspicions. If he should not—she's getting people by the ears and putting ideas into their heads, and you'll have trouble if you don't look out. Put a stop to it, sir. Now I'll say good-day," he added as we reached the front gate of High Oaks, and with a nod to emphasize his warning, he walked off down the hill again.

But he might have nodded his head off altogether

before Albinia would have taken any notice or desisted from her sleuthing.

I walked up to the house thinking over this new development, and rather pleased that for once the amateur seemed to have come into his own. It was true, it had been more or less by accident; had I not embarked upon the Delmico inquiry, which had proved a wild-goose chase, I should not have stumbled against the stone beneath which Durande was lying hid.

That, too, might end in nothing, but meanwhile it seemed worth delving deeper into the accumulation of dry-as-dust papers awaiting me in those locked drawers. There were several packets still untouched except for the cursory police examination, and I determined to put them through a most searching scrutiny without further delay.

But I did not come across a repetition of the name Durande. In the earlier counterfoils, as I have said, there were records of small or moderate sums paid to the name.

But there were gaps in dates and numbers, whole books of counterfoils missing, showing that Bertram Goodlake had either drawn cheques on other sources for his requirements than these records divulged, or possibly had deposited old counterfoils and papers elsewhere. A man who had knocked about the world in so irresponsible a fashion, might have left the flotsam and jetsam of a wandering life on many shores, a portion of which might come to hand after a further lapse of time. It was still early days for all the threads of his affairs to be gathered to a point.

I was in the middle of it all when Albinia turned

up unexpectedly. She looked hot and tired and I asked her what she had been doing.

It was always a matter of wonder to me why my sister was not more attractive. She was quite good-looking in a regular-featured sort of way; hair of no particular colour brushed back from her face and gathered neatly into a blob at the nape of her neck. Not shingled, of course, nor permanently waved—whatever that may mean, as I am informed the permanent wave comes out in the course of a month or two. Either of those interferences with the designs of the Creator Albinia would consider likely to bring a curse upon the head that permitted it. Diana had once pointed out when remonstrated with in regard to the aids to beauty in common use, that the trimming of nails might equally be considered an interference with the intentions of Providence, but according to my sister, Providence had no objection, so long as the object was use and not ornament.

Her eyes were also of no particular colour, slightly but not aggressively prominent; a rather wide, straight mouth, uncompromising in line, and good teeth. Not half bad to look at, and yet the self-complacency writ large all over her, and in the slightly too-turned-out toes as she walked, tempted you to contradict everything she said, whether you agreed with it or not. At least that is the way it took me; Diana said that as she never agreed with her anyhow it wouldn't have made any difference.

I tumbled the papers back into the drawer and locked it. Albinia dropped into the nearest chair and answered my question.

"I have been keeping an eye on that man Far-

john—when he isn't in Diana's pocket—and it takes me all my time."

She certainly had the knack of putting one on edge with a word or two!

"I wish to goodness you would let the man alone!" I rejoined irritably. "If you don't take care he will be asking for police protection, and a pretty figure you'd cut then in the hotel!"

"I don't care about that," she replied obstinately. "Nobody seems to be doing anything towards discovering the murderer, and after all, Bertram Goodlake *was* my cousin."

"Of course he was! Nobody is disputing it! He was mine too!" I retorted, "and if he had been nobody's cousin the police would be doing their best on their own account. It's silly to talk like that, Albinia! What good on earth do you think you're doing by following Farjohn about? What's it going to lead to?"

"To the gallows, I hope," she answered fervently; if she expected me to be impressed she was disappointed, as I only laughed.

"You really are the limit!" I protested. "But your folly will probably get us all into trouble before you have done. What makes you think Farjohn has anything to do with it?" She rose and moved restlessly about the room—hardly seemed to be listening to what I said. "Do you imagine he has got the emeralds in his pocket?" I added ironically.

But she took it seriously.

"If he had got the emeralds in his pocket he would have made off long ago. But he hopes to have them there, and that is what I am determined

to prevent. He has been up here several times when you have known nothing about it, and I am not at all sure he hasn't discovered the 'clue'—whatever it may be—and is trying to get a chance to make use of it."

CHAPTER XVII

I LOOKED at her sceptically.

"As we have all been vainly hunting for old Bertram's 'clue' day after day ever since his death, inside and outside the house, I don't for a moment suppose Farjohn has found it," I rejoined. "There isn't a hole or corner that hasn't been raked out. You can put that out of your mind, Albinia," I protested, with a recollection of Inspector Drewsbury's suggestion that her activities should be discouraged. I rose and followed her to the studio end of the room. "Had you any idea he was such a fine artist—old Bertram I mean?" I added, as much to change the conversation as anything else. I was getting a bit tired of Farjohn as a *pièce de résistance*, "He certainly could draw."

"I knew no more about him than you did. Not so much in fact. I don't recollect ever having seen him."

"His work surprises me." I turned the easel with my favourite sunny garden scene more towards the light. "Look at the feeling in the colour of those old bricks!"

"I don't care about English scenery—too tame. This is the drawing I like," and she picked out a vivid painting of a storm-stricken hill-top. "That is the sketch I should frame if I were you!"

"Would you like it? I will have it framed for

you, Albinia, with the greatest pleasure in life," and in answer to her pleased acceptance I put it aside.

"Where is Diana?" my sister asked abruptly after a pause, during which she had been turning over the sketches lying on the table.

"Lord knows! Off somewhere with Lanham, I expect. She likes running round the country in that little car of his." The words sounded gayer than my mood justified, but I was not going to let Albinia know that if I could help it.

She smiled—not maliciously; I will say that for her, she was never consciously malicious; only censorious and always cocksure.

"Youth calling to youth and all that sort of thing, I suppose? If you will marry a girl younger——"

"And why shouldn't youth call to youth?" I interposed coldly. "Peter Lanham, I believe, is doing a bit of investigating on his own account—so he says—and I have no doubt Diana helps him when she can."

But the words carried no conviction, I could see that; I was not convinced myself, and Peter's sleuthing was not likely to be very convincing either. It kept him out of mischief perhaps.

Albinia looked sideways at me. "Oh," she observed dispassionately. I didn't know it was possible to put so much meaning into a simple vowel sound.

"Come, Albinia!" I exclaimed, exasperated. "Don't go hinting at things you know you don't mean. It's a low-down game!"

"I am only fighting your battles," she said,

turning her eyes of indeterminate colour to meet mine. "I didn't mean anything particular—not what you think I meant."

"I can fight my battles myself," I rejoined, then shepherding the conversation into a safer channel, and in half a mind by way of a diversion to tell her of the discovery of the name Delmico on the counterfoil now that it had come to nothing, I added: "What do you think of Dr. Delmico?"

"I don't think of him," was the curt reply. "Why should I? I don't like him; I shouldn't like him even if he hadn't got a beard."

I was amused.

"Don't you like beards?"

She shook her head.

"You never know what's underneath a beard—a mouth like a codfish, perhaps, or no chin. With a clean-shaven man at all events you know the worst," she moved towards the door. "I can tell you something, Humphrey, though you probably won't believe me—to use Diana's inelegant language—you are barking up the wrong tree," and she left me to find an answer to the conundrum for myself.

"Was that what you came to tell me?" I called after her, but her footsteps died away as she reached the front doorsteps, and after wondering idly for a moment what she meant, the matter faded from my mind.

What a curious trick some people have of ruffling your equanimity; leaving you with the sparkle gone out of the sun, the rose bereft of its scent!

Albinia would no doubt have been shocked had she realized the blight her presence could cast—

and generally did—on the lightest of hearts. Of course, I told myself, she had been talking stuff and nonsense—youth calling to youth—and that sort of cheap jargon!—but somehow, just for the moment, she had turned my world grey, the future drab-coloured; I had an undefined sensation of a wilderness, bleak, lava-ridden, stretching drearily to vague horizons—and then laughed at myself for a fool!

Tea would be waiting at the hotel, and Diana and Peter and all the rest of them back from the afternoon's entertainment, whatever it might have been; answering to the call of tea. The best remedy for my particular disease was to join them.

But the terrace, when I arrived there, was deserted except for Miss "Highbrow," as Diana and I continued to call her between ourselves. She looked very cool and composed, seated alone on the fringe of the shadows cast by an acacia tree, across the gravel and on to the front of the house.

"Where are they all?" I asked, "and what have you been doing? Reading something too deep for the ordinary digestion while we have been pursuing our frivolous ways?"

She shook her head.

"No," she said evenly, "I have been walking about—in the woods," and removing the horn-rimmed spectacles, she looked at me gravely with a pair of calm grey eyes.

"I suppose everybody has been sleuthing along their own private line," I went on, and seated myself on the balustrade, back to the sun. "You seem

about the only member of the party who isn't in the chase. Aren't you interested ? "

" Certainly I am interested," she hesitated a moment, " but don't you think such matters are better left to the police ? I don't believe in capital punishment, you see, so it would be against my principles to help to bring a murderer to justice."

" You'd sooner let him loose on society," I rejoined brightly. " If a relation of your own had been murdered you might look upon it differently."

" I would never allow my judgment to be affected by personal feeling," she replied, which of course was an admirable sentiment.

" Here is one of the unprincipled sleuth-hounds," I remarked as Peter Lanham drifted through the doorway from the winter garden and sauntered towards us. " I don't know what his particular fancy is, but he seems pretty industrious in following it up. One only catches sight of him once in a blue moon these days."

" I consider Mr. Lanham——" Miss " Highbrow " began ; but I had no desire to hear her opinion of Peter, a type of fresh, out-of-door young man whom she would doubtless hold in profound contempt. I cut her short rather unceremoniously by calling out to him to tell somebody to bring tea.

" Done so already," he answered, " it'll be here in a jiff," he perched himself on the stone coping beside me and lit a cigarette. " The cup that cheers won't come amiss."

" Been on the trail ? " I hazarded. " Pretty hard work running round in a car ! "

The words appeared tipped with a little more sarcasm than I had intended, but he looked at me

so shamefacedly that for some reason my spirits reacted and dropped to zero. That there should be cause for shamefacedness regarding the way he had spent the afternoon seemed to emphasize a situation towards which I was determinedly turning a blind eye.

"I should hardly call it that," he said, staring at the glowing end of the cigarette.

"Where is Diana?" I asked abruptly, and his look of relief was quite apparent when at the same moment her appearance through the long window behind us released him from the necessity to answer the question.

"Who is asking for me?" she said, pulling off her hat and dropping into a chair. "I want tea, and so does everybody else, I expect—including Mona," as Mrs. Vaughan, springing, it seemed, from nowhere, appeared on the lawn below us. "What has everyone been doing? I can guess at Humphrey's occupation—I bet he has been shut up at High Oaks rummaging about the musty old papers he keeps locked up in the writing-table drawers. I believe myself the phantom clue is there—just because he won't let anybody look!"

Mrs. Vaughan mounted the steps as the tea-tray arrived, ordered some for herself from the waiter, and leaning against a stone vase crowned with a tangle of scarlet geranium, stood surveying the rest of us.

"I suppose the police have been through all the papers, haven't they?" she observed.

"The police!" Diana retorted, "they probably wouldn't recognize the clue when they saw it!"

"Quite excusably," I put in, "it may have some

bearing on family matters they know nothing about. I shall have to go through every scrap of writing myself."

I could have made a bit of a sensation by telling them about the Durande incident, but decided to keep it dark. None of them was likely to be able to throw any light on it.

"Well, if the clue never turns up it won't be for want of looking for it!" I remarked, cutting a slice off an uninteresting cake. "I am beginning to have serious doubts about it myself."

"Don't be a pessimist," Diana protested, "I am sure we shall find it—and the emeralds, if we search long enough."

"Of the two I would rather find the murderer," I remarked.

"We shall do both," she rejoined. "Whatever your cousin meant by the clue at High Oaks, it will first lead us to the emeralds and then to the murderer—the secretary—or first to the secretary and then to the emeralds. Having murdered a man for the sake of the latter you may be sure he won't let go the quarry, or the chance of it, if he can help it—and somehow the clue will give him away. That's what I believe!"

"I hope you will find the emeralds—but so long as the law of England remains what it is, I hope you will *not* find the criminal," Miss "Highbrow" remarked, to everyone's surprise. "Two wrongs can never make a right," with which indisputable copy-book sentiment she rose, replaced her glasses on her quite shapely nose and disappeared into the house.

"There's something in what she says," Peter Lanham observed, looking into his tea-cup.

"Only that if we catch both the murderer and the emeralds, it will be two 'rights,'" Diana remarked.

"Are you against capital punishment, Peter?" I asked in some surprise.

"I don't know," he replied gloomily, "it's a very difficult question."

"Mr. Farjohn says——" Diana began.

"Where is Mr. Farjohn?" Mrs. Vaughan asked of the company in general. As no one seemed to know—or care—Diana went on:

"Mr. Farjohn says that if capital punishment were to be done away with, detective fiction would come to an end—so I mean to get my book finished first."

"Serious as that result might be, it is hardly likely to weigh as an argument against altering the law," I suggested. "What reason does Farjohn give for holding that opinion?"

"He says it is the shadow of the gallows—or whatever may stand for them—that must always be the incentive to the reader's excitement. The life hanging in the balance, on discovery, or non-discovery. And there's something in what he says. If you think of it, if the crime were larceny or some comparatively trivial affair that would only entail a moderate sort of penalty, the greater the mystery and the more tangled the threads, the more certainly much-ado-about-nothing would be the verdict upon it. If you have much-ado, you must have some stupendous issue to justify it."

"Diana is making detective fiction a sort of science!" Mrs. Vaughan laughed, "——takes it quite seriously."

"It *is* a sort of science—or rather an art," Diana protested. "Mr. Farjohn is showing me that much. He has made a study of it. It isn't as easy as you think to write a story with a secret in it that mustn't be given away, and make the readers sympathize with the right people, and prejudice them against the villains and the vamps without their knowing it, or they would guess who is the criminal. If you let them like the murderer—ever so little—they will be sorry when the handcuffs are clapped on his wrists in the last chapter, and will feel the story has come out all wrong. Mr. Farjohn is very surprised at women being able to write such good detective stories; he didn't think they had enough logic—which is of course absurd," she finished.

"Why absurd?" Peter asked. "Women aren't supposed to be logical."

"Women weren't supposed to be lots of things men are beginning to find out they are," Diana retorted, "—and always were, and until lately they weren't allowed to be logical—the men found it inconvenient."

Peter laughed, and held out his cup for more tea.

"You may laugh, but it's quite true," Diana went on. "It was settled outside the Garden of Eden. Adam called the first committee meeting after he had been getting the worst of an argument with Eve. He put the resolution—that it be decided that women had no sense of logic, never had had, and never would have. Cain seconded it, and Abel passed it unanimously. It has remained in the minutes ever since."

She laughed, rose, slipped her hand into the crook of my arm as I sat still perched on the balustrade,

and murmuring: "Let's go for a turn, Goody," drew me down the steps in the direction of the woods.

And willingly enough I went, although in spite of my better sense, Albinia's phrase "youth calls to youth," would ring in my ear. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask her how she had spent the afternoon, but pride came to the rescue, or froze the words on my lips, whichever way you like to put it; or it might have been something else—a less admirable quality—fear, perhaps, that I might be inviting a turn of the knife in the wound. Yet for that matter it was absurd to call it a wound, or a knife, or anything so definite! It was perfectly ridiculous to read anything into a friendship dating from childhood's days, a harmless comradeship, and which I had myself encouraged more or less. My years were just weighing a little more heavily at the moment—and they were not such a vast number of years after all!

"You don't mind me consulting Mr. Farjohn about my book, do you?" she asked confidingly as we passed out of reach of listening ears. I hastened to reassure her.

"I wish Albinia would leave him alone," she went on, "it's absurd of her to think he has anything to do with this case. He isn't even so very much interested in it. She'll find there's a rod in pickle for her if she doesn't take care; he'll complain to the police about her! She's so obvious!" she finished contemptuously.

As it turned out it was for me the rod in pickle was waiting, and Albinia herself was to furnish it.

Personally I agreed with Diana. There seemed

nothing at all to connect Farjohn with the affair. He was not the type of man somehow who would have been content to follow an old eccentric like Bertram Goodlake over half the globe, putting up with his vagaries and doing his errands—for secretary must have been a merely euphonious term, as old Bertram never put pen to paper if he could avoid it. The "professor" fitted far more convincingly into the niche, with his foreign name and hint of foreign blood; I was still a little worried about the "Delmico" of the counterfoil in spite of the inspector's reassurance on the subject. But I had identified him all right for myself in one of those literary reference books as a writer on psychology, and Drewsbury had vouched for the soundness of his alibi on the night of the murder, so it did seem he was ruled out of court as the actual criminal; although there was still the possibility that he had employed another hand to do the deed.

What in thunder had old Bertram meant by the cryptic saying—"at the back of the old wall; where the sunshine made a pattern on the grass"—or words to that effect? And *what* was at the back of the wall?

Not the emeralds! In spite of all Diana might say to the contrary, I would lay my life on that. No man, not even my cranky old cousin, would be so mad as to play hide and seek with jewels that represented a fortune! What we should find—if we ever found anything—would be a clue to where they were hidden, or where to find the secretary; probably the latter. Even then the task would be only begun. After all this time that elusive individual, with or without the emeralds, would have

made a get-away, assumed another name, and melted into the seething masses of some great city either in Europe, or some other continent, while we had been looking for an old problematical wall, and trying to solve the riddle set by a crossword puzzle maniac! If it had not been for the tragedy of his end there were several epithets I should have considered appropriate to apply to him.

The following afternoon, although grey and threatening, Diana and Mrs. Vaughan returned to the scene of action. I should have imagined every corner had been explored inside the house, and every bit of wall likely or unlikely, outside. But Diana is nothing if not thorough, and she persisted in searching for some secret receptacle, which being within the walls of the house might fill the bill in one respect, though where the sunshine making patterns on the grass was to come in was beyond her powers of explanation. She and her companion threw out hints about being given the keys of the drawers with a view to making a personal inspection of the papers locked up in them.

"I may see something in them which may not have struck you," Diana urged. "It's so easy to pass things over."

But so far I had considered it wiser to keep my own counsel as to the revelations of the counterfoils; already there was Albinia dogging Farjohn wherever he went, and I had no desire to see someone else trailing Delmico. So I remained adamant—and the drawers remained locked.

I declined on this occasion to accompany them, although I admired their pertinacity. They preferred to walk so, as I had some business to do in

Paignhamstead connected with papers to be signed in the presence of a Commissioner for Oaths, I took the car and ran into the town.

The business was soon over, and by four o'clock I was back at the hotel, to be met at the front door by Albinia, who was apparently looking out for me. She was very white and obviously in a state of great agitation.

"Humphrey!" she whispered rapidly, "I am thankful you have come back! You have all been laughing at me, but I knew I was on the right track. I have got that man Farjohn," she glanced over her shoulder to make sure no one was within hearing, "locked up in the vault underneath the old ruined chapel in the wood!"

I gazed at her aghast.

"What do you mean?" I asked sharply, "what chapel?"

"There's an old ruin in the wood, and I've got him——"

"Good Lord, Albinia!" I exclaimed, "what the devil are you talking about? Got Farjohn locked up in a vault! Why on earth——?"

"Because he committed the murder!" she interrupted, still in a whisper. "I have said so all along—and I have telephoned to the police in Paignhamstead!"

CHAPTER XVIII

HAVE you ever fallen out of a tree into a deep pond on a cold day and wondered if you were ever coming to the top ?

I did when I was five years old, and the sensations then experienced were revived when Albinia made her announcement.

As men will in moments of stress, I reverted to the manners of Stone Age and said : " Devil take you, Albinia ! " very heartily.

She looked surprised.

" Why ? " she asked, with an exasperating air of genuine interest.

" For having played such a fool trick ! " I rejoined. " Can't you see all the trouble it will land us in ? "

" I thought it was what you are all trying to do," she said, " —catch the murderer—and I flatter myself I've caught him."

There was only one thing to be done, and that immediately.

" Damn it all ! " I exclaimed. " Tell me at once where this man is and I will go and let him out without a moment's delay ! You must be mad ! Don't you know what trouble this mayn't mean—law courts and damages, and devil knows what ! Why, if the man had committed a dozen murders—and he probably hasn't committed any at all—you

have no right to put a hand on him without a warrant!"

"Red tape," she answered shortly.

"Red grandmothers!—it may be red tape, but it's the law of the land!" I retorted. I could have shaken her! She appeared to be so thoroughly satisfied with the turn she had given to the affair.

"You men are tied up in red tape," she went on. "Women always have a pair of scissors handy to give it a snip, and I haven't the least intention of letting him out till I hand him over to the police," and she regarded me with a certain dogged set of the chin I knew only too well.

I still could hardly believe I had rightly understood her.

"Where is this vault or whatever it is?" I urged. "I am going to let him out at once!"

We were standing on the gravelled approach to the hotel, and as I laid a hand on her arm she dug her heels firmly into the ground and twisted her arm away.

"You are *not* going to let him out," she reiterated. "Do you suppose I've taken all this trouble for nothing? I have been watching him for days, and I told you—I recognized him the minute I saw him!"

"Recognized him?" I asked, staring at her, and for the first time wondering if there was anything in it, "how do you mean—you recognized him? I do wish you would be more explicit!"

"Every time I try to be explicit you burst in about letting him out," she protested. "To begin with, he has got a pistol, and he's not safe!"

"I don't suppose he is—if he has got a pistol,"

I said grimly. "No man in his circumstances would be safe!"

"In fact, he will be raging mad," she went on calmly, —I could well believe it!—" and I am not going to let him out till the policeman comes!"

"What do you mean by saying you recognized him?" I repeated.

"I remembered where I had seen him before. It was in an hotel at Buxton three years ago—when a pearl necklace was stolen which was never traced. It was worth thousands! You must admit it's odd that wherever he appears a crime seems to get committed. Last time it was pearls, this time it's emeralds! So I have kept an eye on him, and I haven't time to tell you now of all the suspicious things I have seen—he came out of somebody's bedroom one day, where I am sure he had no business to be—and I have seen him hanging about High Oaks more than once—and Dr. Delmico says——"

"Oh, hang Dr. Delmico!" I exclaimed. "How do you know he has a pistol?"

"Because I saw it this afternoon—that was the climax! I was behind a rhododendron bush at the foot of the lawn," she explained shamelessly, "and I saw him take a pistol out of his pocket and snap the trigger and things as if he wanted to make sure it was working all right. So then I was certain I was right, and——"

"Well?" I asked impatiently, "get on with it. Somebody will have to pay through the nose for this business, and I suppose it will be me!"

"Well," she went on hurriedly, and speaking all in a breath, "I went to the old ruin in the wood and

pretended I had sprained my ankle,"—she did look a little shamefaced at this point—" and—and well, when I had got him into the vault——" she broke off and said inquiringly, " you understand ? "

" I quite understand how you did it, if that's what you mean—worked on his better feelings, I suppose ! " I replied grimly.

" When I had got him safe in the vault," she went on, " I ran out and dropped an old bar across the door—it's a solid door with nails in it—and came back to the hotel and rang up the police station at Paignhamstead, and a policeman ought to be here at any minute now ! " she finished complacently.

" This ruined vault is somewhere in the wood beyond the grounds then ? " I said, and was starting in that direction when Diana's clear voice rang out behind me.

" What are you two looking so grim about ? " she asked. " Mona and I have just got back from a strenuous afternoon's work—with no luck, I may add—and we want tea. She is on the terrace waiting."

" Grim ! " I rejoined, looking back over my shoulder. " We shall all look grim enough before this business is settled ! "

" What business ? " looking from one to the other. " What's up, Albinia ? "

The set of my sister's lips became still more obstinate.

" Humphrey had better tell you," she replied stiffly.

" Come along," I exclaimed, " I am going to find this place. Do you know of any old vault

in the woods, Diana ? " and I marched off as fast as my lame leg would allow, the other two following close behind.

" Of course I do—if you mean the old chapel. Why are you going there ? "

" Then show me the way—and don't stop there talking," I replied.

" What's the matter ? " she asked again.

" Albinia has shut Farjohn up in the vault, and I am going to let him out—and when you have shown me where the place is you two had better clear out. He will probably be very much annoyed and will have more to say about it than you will care to listen to."

" He will probably blow your head off with the pistol," Albinia said earnestly, " before he says anything at all ! A man who has done one murder isn't likely to stick at a second ! "

" Mr. Farjohn done the murder ! " Diana exclaimed. " Who says so ? " and she glanced angrily at Albinia.

" I say so," Albinia answered promptly. " Humphrey doesn't believe it, but he hasn't seen what I've seen—no more have you—and he has got a pistol—the Farjohn man, I mean. The least you can do is to wait for the police," she added. " They are used to being shot at, I suppose."

" It seems to me you have been a perfect idiot, Albinia," Diana remarked. " Why the dickens should Mr. Farjohn shoot at us when we have come to let him out ? "

But Albinia shut her mouth the more firmly and said nothing. I could see she meant to give trouble before she released her prisoner.

"You are going too far to the left," Diana said, passing me to lead the way, "the ruin is over there," and she pointed away to the right into the thick undergrowth through which a path wound among the trees. "May I ask," she added over her shoulder with biting sarcasm, "if Albinia thinks Mr. Farjohn murdered your cousin, Bertram Goodlake, and then stole the emeralds?"

"God knows what she thinks!" I rejoined gloomily. I was not looking forward to the coming interview with any enthusiasm.

"It is for the police to settle that question," Albinia said curtly, "I know what I am doing all right."

As she spoke we sighted something through the trees that appeared to be masonry—irregular stone walls overgrown with ivy—and Diana remarked:

"Here we are!"

I approached the place with some caution. At the best I had no relish for the interview before me; at worst the enraged occupant might possibly take a pot-shot at me through some crack in the masonry, or from the door as I pushed it open. Again I warned the others to get out of range, but Albinia was too irate at my interference, and Diana too curious to pay attention.

It was a curious place. So overgrown with brushwood and hemmed in by trees that unless you actually stumbled on to the spot you would never have noticed it. It appeared to have been a chapel, probably the private chapel of the erstwhile owner of the property; rumour said that the hotel had been built on the site of an old country house. The upper part of the building was a shell, roofless, the

walls in places level with the undergrowth surrounding it, one or two gaping windows, the moss-covered stones framing them looking as though the faintest earth tremor would send them tottering to destruction.

The floor of the chapel was raised considerably above what must once have been its level, rubble and fallen stones mixed in inextricable confusion, and all covered with a tangle of weeds and nettles.

At the end nearest to us a short flight of steps led down to the door of the vault referred to by Albinia, which I saw was just as she had described it, thick and nail-studded with a stout wooden bar dropped into a staple across it. As I approached it, my sister raised her voice.

"I protest!" she cried. "I call both of you to witness! I have succeeded in shutting up a dangerous criminal, and I protest at your action, Humphrey, in setting him free before the police arrive." Then turning suddenly: "Thank goodness, here they come!" she cried.

Footsteps could be heard crashing through the underwood and dry leaves behind us, and, following the direction of her eyes, I saw the dark blue coat and shining buttons of Batt, the constable who had been in charge of the front gate at High Oaks, emerge into full view.

"What's all this about, sir?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

I answered his question with another.

"How did you find us?"

"Followed you," he replied. "I saw you talking in the driveway, and as it was one of the ladies

what rung up the station I kept her in sight like. What's the trouble ? " he repeated.

" You had better take charge, constable," I admonished ; not that it would relieve me of subsequent responsibilities, but at all events the further proceedings would have the law behind them. " There's a gentleman called Farjohn shut up in that vault, and I have reason to believe he is carrying a firearm of some kind—which of course is illegal," a touch of genius in that, I thought, as a peg on which to hang the attack upon him, " and as he is probably very annoyed at his incarceration, you had better look out ! He may have a shot at us ! I will lift the wooden bar, upon which he will probably push open the door, so you had better be ready with your truncheon, and get him as he comes out."

I spoke in hardly more than a whisper, as we had descended two or three steps and were close up to the door by this time, and I signalled to Diana and Albinia to get away out of range. But having forgotten in the excitement of the chase that Albinia was probably entirely mistaken, and that to have felled an innocent man with a truncheon would still further increase my liabilities, I added : " Don't be too ready to hit him unless he shows fight."

" All very fine, sir," he whispered back, " but if a truncheon's to be any good against a gun, it's got to get in first," which was so true I had nothing to say.

Then it struck me a parley might have its effect. I rapped on the door, still guarded by the wooden bar.

"Farjohn," I called, "there has been some mistake——"

"There has been nothing of the kind!" my sister's voice cried from somewhere behind a tree.

"I have come to open the door and let you out," and I paused, not quite sure what I expected in return—a mild retort or a volley of abuse.

Neither came. I made one more effort.

"You have every right to be annoyed," I called through the door, "and I can only offer the most humble apologies. We are going to open the door."

I lifted the bar from the socket, and Batt and I stood by.

But nothing happened. The old nail-studded oak did not stir an inch, and with another word of caution to my companion, I caught at the stub of what had once been a handle and pulled it towards us.

Dead silence greeted us, and Batt put his head in.

"Bird flown," he said tersely, drawing it out again. "Full of emptiness. Seems to me there's a hole of some sort at the other end, to judge by the amount of daylight inside."

Albinia, coming out from covert, sat down suddenly on the ground, her jaw dropped in astonishment and chagrin. Diana laughed out.

Personally I was never more relieved in my life. I could have embraced Farjohn for cutting the knot in so simple a fashion. Further exploration revealed quite a big hole in the masonry at the far end, and as the ground sloped away from the building he must have climbed out quite easily and walked back to the hotel!

Batt put his hand over his mouth just too late to hide the widest grin it has ever been my lot to behold, but I am sure, although professing nothing but amusement at the situation, he was also relieved at being spared an unequal contest with an armed foe.

The only one of the party who was genuinely exasperated at the pricking of the bubble, and could see no humour in the situation, was Albinia, and she was impartially furious with everybody—with Farjohn most of all. No doubt she foresaw a very humiliating meeting with him in the near future, and although in my opinion she had acted more than foolishly and been egregiously mistaken, I was sorry for her. The same consideration could hardly have been expected from Diana for, after all, she and Farjohn had been friendly, and it was easy to picture her indignation at Albinia's suspicions.

Something of a material nature having passed from me to Batt—nothing in the nature of hush money, of course, but mere appreciation of his trouble and waste of time—we returned to the hotel. How Albinia proposed to face the man she had inveigled into that mouldy vault by playing on his better nature with a sham sprained ankle, I neither knew nor cared; but I did wonder what my own attitude should be; should I treat the whole affair as a joke, or would the next step in events be a summons for assault served on my sister?

I fancied not. The nimble legal tongue should surely be able to persuade any court that the whole episode had been in the nature of a practical joke. To shut the door at one end of an enclosure on a man when there was an aperture conveniently

waiting for him to get out by at the other, could hardly be regarded as a serious assault! And my only part in the affair had been an attempt to release him.

All such conjecture, however, came to an end on arrival at the hotel.

We walked in at the front door about half-past five, and Diana, with the assurance of innocence, boldly asked the hall-porter if Mr. Farjohn had returned.

"Yes, madam," was the prompt reply, "Mr. Farjohn came in about three-thirty, packed his suit-case in a hurry, and left the hotel in time to catch the up express."

We looked at one another blankly.

"If I write a note to him," Diana asked after a pause, "I suppose you can forward it?"

"Mr. Farjohn has left no address," the man informed her; "he said there wouldn't be no letters for him."

Albinia looked bitterly from Diana to me.

"What did I tell you!" she said as the hall-porter returned to his box. "That is the last any of us will hear of Mr. Farjohn!"

"Don't talk as if it was anybody's fault but your own, Albinia!" Diana admonished. "The next time you think you have got a murderer safely in your pocket you had better make sure there isn't a hole in it!"

And, for once, my sister left the attack unde-fended.

But Diana continued to express her indignation over Farjohn's sudden disappearance.

"Albinia has scared him out of the place!" she

protested. "She is enough to scare anybody—with her fancied resemblance to somebody she has seen before! Everybody you meet reminds you of somebody you have seen before, and even if it were true what she says, that he had been at the same hotel as she was, it doesn't follow he stole the pearl necklace! When you come to think of it," she said, struck with a bright idea, "he might say the same of her! *She* has been at the same hotel as *he* was—so why shouldn't he say it was *she* who stole the necklace?"

"I have no doubt that is very lucid, but I should want to hear it several times over before I really understand it," I remarked.

"Anyway, I shall mention it to Albinia," she added thoughtfully, "— put it to her straight from the shoulder."

"Well, don't do it till after dinner," I urged. "Let us at all events have that meal in peace."

"She won't talk about it, that's one comfort!" Diana went on. "You must feel a bit of a fool when you have taken so much trouble to lock a man into a vault that has a hole at the other end of it. I like Mr. Farjohn, and I don't believe there is any harm in him. He was the only person in this hotel who could talk sensibly about—oh, almost anything—a man of the world, and he would have helped me with my book. But it's always the way—no sooner do you make a friend than——"

"Let's see," I interrupted; I had had enough of Farjohn for the moment, "—how does it go? 'I never loved a dear gazelle——'"

"I know all about that gazelle," she interposed, "when you got to love it well, it upped and died!

You're inclined to be a little soppy this morning, Goody," she finished gently.

"I fancied you were getting a trifle 'soppy', as you call it, over Farjohn," was my rejoinder, "and it's quite on the cards he doesn't deserve any sop. I am afraid, on thinking it over, I shall have to report the cause of his sudden disappearance to the inspector. It looks almost as if——" I hesitated for a word.

Diana kindly supplied it.

"As if he'd done a bunk," she said. "I don't believe it. He's fed up with Albinia, that's all."

"They say that foreigners find idiomatic English very difficult to acquire," I observed dryly. "Anyway, I hope the incident won't become public property."

"So do I. It would certainly make Albinia look a bit of a fool—and of course we should have to stand by her at a pinch."

"Good girl!" I agreed. My dear Diana was never wanting in loyalty when it came to the point.

"Who is soppy now?" she remarked—which I thought was over-stating the case; but she slipped out of the room before I had time to say so.

CHAPTER XIX

HALF an hour later Inspector Drewsbury found me on the terrace. He had not been to see me for some days, but seemed to have little progress to report. I took the opportunity of telling him of Farjohn's hurried departure and of what had led to it. When I explained how Albinia had held the fort at one end of the vault, while her prisoner was getting out through a hole at the other, he laughed till the tears ran down his face.

"Yes," I said, "it's very funny, and all very well having a sense of humour, but the man has got away, and what do you propose to do next?"

He pulled himself together.

"We've got nothing against him," he pointed out. "Comes of these amateurs interfering! Leastways——" pulling himself up, "we *had* nothing against him. This sudden bolt perhaps puts a different complexion on it."

He produced the leather note-book and fingered the pencil as he went on speaking.

"If he's mixed up in this emerald business, he'll be making for the Continent—got his passport, no doubt, in order and all ready. Must have got a scare when Miss Goodlake got busy," he spoke seriously enough now, "and may have felt things were getting a bit too hot for him. I wish she had

left it alone—or told me of her suspicions," he added.

"Well—you didn't seem to be doing much about it yourself, Inspector—did you?—nor were you inclined to suffer amateurs gladly?" I suggested. I, too, wished Albinia had left it alone, but as Diana had said, one has got to stand up for one's own.

"As I said, sir—there was nothing against him," he answered evasively, "—didn't even seem to take much interest in the case, from what I heard. Not that that goes for much. Left by the up express——" he pinched his lower lip between finger and thumb, "that 'ud be the three-fifty-nine this afternoon—got a good start!" He drew himself up briskly, the alert attention returning to his eyes. "I'll see to it—put a watch on the ports——"

"Lock all the stable doors, in fact!" Diana's voice said sweetly behind me. "Why shouldn't Mr. Farjohn have *flown* to France and from there to goodness knows where, without troubling the ports at all?"

The inspector eyed her distastefully. I can describe it in no other way, whereupon she produced lipstick and powder-puff and set to work as though inspectors from Scotland Yard were negligible objects.

"Do you think frankly there is any reason to suspect him seriously?" I asked bluntly. "If so, it certainly seems a pity this incident should have put him wise to it."

"I think Miss Goodlake would have done better to let him alone," was the evasive reply. "We

lay our plans and start to work 'em out, and then someone comes butting in and we have to start all over again."

"Anyway," Diana observed, replacing her tools in her bag, "if he is the murderer—which is ridiculous — he certainly hasn't got the emeralds."

The inspector regarded her with a degree more of interest.

"Why should you say that?"

"Common sense. If he already had them in his possession he would have made his get-away—I believe that is the correct expression?" she glanced interrogatively at the inspector, who allowed himself the faintest of smiles in assent, "—long ago. What would be the sense of hanging about here? Asking for trouble."

She paused and Drewsbury nodded.

"On the other hand, if he hadn't succeeded in locating and stealing them, there certainly would not have been time for him to do so, between escaping through the hole in the vault and catching the London express. So," she finished, her eyes fixed on the inspector's face, "I say—he has not got the emeralds."

"I had come to the same decision," he replied with a hint of approval.

"And the emeralds—and the clue to them are still to find," she added.

"I am not so sure about the clue," he said, returning to his official aloofness of demeanour, "and I ought to have been informed of the fact immediately he disappeared," he said stiffly, ignoring Diana's sarcasm, "—time lost — with

a start like that—anyway I'll see to it, sir," and was gone.

"He'll see to Batt, too, I am afraid," I muttered. "I am sorry to have given the man away, if he hadn't reported the affair himself."

"Batt may not know of Mr. Farjohn's disappearance yet," Diana suggested, "and that is the only suspicious point there is against him. You can't take Albinia's babblings about recognizing him seriously."

Which was true, and I hoped the policeman might be able to put up a good defence for not having reported the affair immediately by telephone to higher authority. He had probably regarded the whole thing as a joke.

Farjohn's flight, as they called it, caused quite a flutter, though, so far as I knew, the real cause of it had not leaked out. Everyone had their own pet theory to account for it.

Dr. Delmico—whom I still found it difficult not to regard with suspicion—declared he had always known there was something fishy about him. He had taken the opportunity one day to ask what he mostly dreamt about, and the answer had been so hair-raising that he was writing a special treatise on the subject. Hair-raising was the only term he could apply to what Farjohn had told him; he had not known a man could have such dreams.

"I thought when your dreams were hair-raising you were all right," Diana observed, "and that it's when you dream about roses and lilies and sugar and spice that your friends had better look out."

"In a sense you are right," the professor replied. "If the dreams should be what are called beautiful,

it will probably indicate more deep-seated evil in your character than if the dreams should be—what we have called hair-raising—although naturally, in the latter case, it is a very bad sign."

"So you are a bad lot anyhow!" Diana rejoined. "Poor Mr. Farjohn! It might be a comfort to him to know he is no worse than the rest of us."

Diana and her friend were still searching the house for secret cupboards and Lord knows what, according to the best detective-fiction tradition, the former hinting even at a secret drawer in the writing-table.

"I was making a sort of rough measurement yesterday of the middle drawer—the long, rather shallow one—and my own impression is there is a space at the back unaccounted for," Diana said; but as I knew what "a sort of rough measurement" on Diana's part might amount to I remained unimpressed. "If you pull the drawer right out and then run your hand in as far as it will go, you will find it brought up by a wooden partition long before you reach the back of the writing-table. It's worth investigating."

"If by investigation you mean pulling a fine old piece of furniture to pieces, because you think there is a vacant space at the back of one of the drawers, I'm not taking any," I protested.

"Very unenterprising, I call it," she grumbled, "and the lock had already been forced open by the murderer—at least, I suppose it was he."

"It is extraordinary the police have found out no more about him," Mrs. Vaughan remarked between mouthfuls of bread and butter; we were seated at tea in the winter garden. "I still believe

it was the lunatic, and Dr. Delmico backs me up. He asked Dawkins one day last week what he—Dawkins—dreamt about, and when he answered: 'Beer, mostly—lashins of it!' the professor said he had never had a case like that before and it wanted seeing to—but it didn't get us any nearer who had done the murder. And I don't believe Dawkins dreams about beer. He hoped it would draw a shilling from the professor to go to the Yellow Swan with!"

The day following a man came down from London to give a rough estimate of the value of the water-colours for probate. I did not suppose it would amount to much, as nowadays a name seems to count for more than pure merit. Of course the merit must have been there to establish the name, I know that, but given equal merit, the man without the name rarely gets his deserts. You have to make a very loud noise to attract attention nowadays.

However, the young man sent down by a firm of experts in Bond Street showed his appreciation of my cousin's work straight off. I thoroughly enjoyed my morning with him. We turned over portfolios that, from the accumulation of dust in inaccessible corners and the rottenness of the ties, several of which came off in my hand, as they say, must have lain there neglected for years, and had probably been considered by the police unlikely to be worth a careful overhaul.

It was the more recent work that particularly excited his interest. He agreed with me in the recognition of a master hand, of consummate skill in the brushwork and in the handling of some of

the stronger themes; that he differed from me in my selection of the summer garden scene exhibited on the easel as the pick of the bunch, was merely a question of individual taste, and in no way disturbed the harmony of our relations. I could have spent many more hours with so congenial a companion. He confirmed in the main my own opinion of my cousin's work, and his divergence with regard to the sketch I had put aside on the easel was founded not on want of appreciation of that particular specimen of his art, but on the super-excellence, if I may put it so, of the rest. He complained that a simple theme, such as an English garden in summer-time, although charming and suggestive of the gentler side of nature, did not give sufficient scope for a talent that amounted to genius.

He was more inclined to favour Albinia's choice, and was lost in admiration of the storm-capped mountain-top, showing nature in cataclysmic emotion, a clash of the elements that could only be adequately rendered by a master hand.

Albinia would no doubt preen herself when she heard her own taste was confirmed by a connoisseur of such high standing; and I should not fail to tell her of it. She had been rather more subdued, not quite so cocksure about her own views of men and mice as usual, since the Farjohn episode; at times I was almost sorry for her.

Not that her opinion was altered about the right and justice of his incarceration; it was his escape through the hole in the vault, owing to her own oversight that she was worried about. She still believed she had caged the right bird; it was the

cage, not the bird, that was the source of her regret. We had all kept the secret, and so far as I knew no one in the hotel outside our three selves knew anything about what I can only call the pantomime at the ruined chapel.

Had it been generally known, I fancy she would have betaken herself elsewhere.

That afternoon I drove Diana into Paignhamstead.

It was a lovely day after a showery forenoon, and Diana was at her best. She had a list of things she wanted to do in the town, better than most of its sort for shopping purposes; a book on the writing of detective fiction—how to do it—how not to do it—how to achieve a best seller, and all the rest of it. She had seen it advertised somewhere and considered it indispensable. If not in stock, the bookseller was to order it. A new hat—I have never yet hit off the exact moment when a woman doesn't want a new hat—if the town could provide a simple straw to run about in—her favourite hat had faded till you couldn't tell what colour it had started life with—and other odds and ends that even a provincial town might be expected to provide.

As we ran along shady lanes, patterned with mottled shadows, the smoke rising lazily in blue spirals from the chimneys, tall and short, of Paignhamstead lying in the hollow below, and little sheep-like clouds drifting across the blue sky above it, I understood how it was that to an Englishman there never could be any place like England.

Also, that I was a very lucky man—to be seated beside one of England's fairest daughters—and my

own. I stole a glance at the profile beside me, the straight-cut little nose, the skin like milk and roses —banal that, but serves well enough—and as that was all I could see at the moment owing to the pull-on hat, I supplied the rest from memory, and smiled.

And then Diana all unconsciously shattered my sentimental reflections.

"Peter has disappeared again," she remarked. "Heaven knows where he goes to. He disappears most afternoons on some stunt of his own. I suppose he thinks he is doing a lot towards catching the criminal, but I can't imagine what it is."

It was no use cursing myself for a fool! The mere mention of Peter, with a touch of magic—the black variety—took all the glitter out of the sunshine.

"Don't be an idiot!" my heart muttered at me, "she doesn't really care where he is!"

"If Peter had been forthcoming she wouldn't be seated by your side at this minute," my head retorted. "Of course her old playmate is the companion she prefers!"

"You're fools!—and not worth listening to!" I said to them both—and awoke to the fact that Diana was expecting me to say something.

"Peter is like the rest of us, taken with the sleuthing craze. He'll find himself up against the inspector, like Albinia, if he doesn't take care," I said, my foot on the brake as we commenced the descent into the town.

"Don't talk to me about Albinia," Diana cried impatiently. "It's no good going on about it, but it really was exasperating of her to scare Mr. Farjohn off like that! Heaven knows what he thinks

of us! Not that it matters," she added, "as I don't suppose we shall ever see him again!"

"Unless he is more involved in this business than we guess," I suggested.

She looked round at me quickly.

"You can't think he has anything to do with the murder!" she protested. "If he had, why should he have hung about here?"

"Either in the hope of getting the emeralds, or possibly to find out old Bertram's mysterious clue, and destroy it—before it destroys him. Not that I suspect him myself, I am only looking at all sides of the question."

Diana was silent.

"Well, he has given it up as a bad job now," she said after a long pause, "but I for one will never believe he is guilty—and I saw more of him than any of you! I believe in him," she added loyally, "he is not the type of man who could have committed a crime!"

To which I replied nothing.

Paignhamstead in summer mood attracted visitors, to judge by the jostling crowds in the main street, which had obviously never been intended to accommodate more than half the number of people. They had for the most part the holiday air that English crowds in August invariably present, in spite of the foreign fallacy that we take our pleasures sadly.

And how the clothes help it nowadays! Jade green jumpers, surmounted by red, pink, sky-blue hats; skirts—what there is of them—splashed with the rainbow from A to Z, tangles of colour, or bunches of flowers of every shade and hue, some of

them warranted to make the Royal Horticultural Society tie itself in knots, but adding immensely to the hilarity of nations.

We drew up at the best stationer's shop in the street, and Diana went in to ask for her book.

I can always find amusement in watching a crowd. The faces interest me, each with its different expression, index to the working of the brain behind—if there be one, for now and then one hits up against an utter vacuity, that can only be the offspring of emptiness. Women shopping, children doing their best to get run over, men in flannels, young and old, fair-isle jumpers, no hats ; and at the cross-ways the country town policeman, alert, officious, indicating every point of the compass in turn to cars few and far between, with an air reminiscent of Piccadilly Circus at its most crowded hour.

Diana didn't keep me long. She failed to find her book of recipes for detective fiction in stock, so left the order ; I wanted some cigarettes, having run out of them owing to Peter, and she wanted stamps, so she walked on to the post office, and I, calling first at a tobacconist's followed her there. It was an imposing building, approached by a flight of steps and two doors. As I drew up at the kerb, Diana ran down the steps, her hazel eyes aglow with excitement.

She flung herself into the car beside me and said quickly :

" Drive down that street on the right—fast as you can ! " and she pointed to the cross roads about a hundred yards away, where the policeman's autocratic arm still gestured automatically like an animated semaphore.

"All very well," I muttered as the arm of the law brought us to a full stop to allow another car to get across.

"As if it couldn't have crossed quite easily without hanging us up!" Diana exclaimed. "Trust a policeman——"

"They have got to practise somewhere," I urged, forestalling her opinion of the law's representative, "—and what's up?" I added as, released by an official wave of encouragement, we moved forward again.

"When I went into the post office Farjohn had just handed in a telegram over the counter! I had hardly realized who it was, before he disappeared through the farther door. He didn't see me—but I followed him out, and he turned down this street, but I don't see any signs of him," she finished.

I drew the car gently to a full stop by the kerb.

"If we're following Farjohn I am not taking any," I said firmly. "After Albinia's little experiment the less I see of Farjohn the better I shall be pleased. Let him go in peace!" I added piously.

Diana's face registered several expressions at the same time. There was indignation, disappointment, rank rebellion, reluctant acquiescence, and several others which I hadn't time at the moment to record.

I turned the car towards home.

"But what on earth can he be doing in Paignhamstead?" she said finally, accepting the situation with a docility I suspected to be due to the unlikelihood of running him down.

"Sending off telegrams apparently," I rejoined

" but I for one am not proposing to find out," and it wasn't until half-way to the hotel that we remembered we had forgotten the hat.

And now I wish to give the events of the next few days in their proper sequence.

First, the inspector called, to say Scotland Yard had been in communication with the police in Buenos Ayres, and had discovered that a man called Bertram Goodlake had been a visitor at a certain hotel in the city about twelve years previously; but that he had vanished, as law-abiding citizens are apt to vanish, leaving neither trace nor record behind him. It is only when you break the law that you become entitled to a *dossier* at police head-quarters, so that didn't get us on much farther.

Then Peter came and groused his heart out. I couldn't quite make out what it was all about. He seemed to be excusing himself about something, Diana's name came into it—wanted to turn over a new leaf—had wasted his life, filling it with nothing but trivialities and Lord knows what! I couldn't make head or tail of it, and supposed it was a slightly shady conscience trying to put itself right and still keep in the shade, as shady consciences will. I told him to go to blazes—quite good-humouredly, of course—and he went; at least, he went somewhere, for nobody saw him again that afternoon.

From luncheon till dinner that day I had Diana all to myself. The rest had scattered, the Forsythes and the professor had gone into Paignhamstead, Miss " Highbrow " vanished into the blue, Mrs. Vaughan gone away somewhere for the day—where, I neither knew nor cared—and Albinia keeping

her room with a headache. The honeymoon couple didn't count; they were probably on the map somewhere, but they had a trick of melting into the landscape in a way that amounted to genius.

Finally, on the following morning by the first post, I received an anonymous letter.

CHAPTER XX

IF you have never received an anonymous letter you may possibly not understand the complexity of the sensations it evokes.

The very term implies a communication of an unpleasant nature. I don't suppose anyone ever sent a pleasant anonymous letter !—the necessity for anonymity implies a thrust below the belt.

I received mine at breakfast. That is to say, I collected it among others from the G division of the alphabetical rack in the hall as I went through to the dining-room, and opened it when about half-way through the meal. Albinia was present, but Diana had not yet made a belated appearance—belated, I fancy, because Albinia openly disapproved of unpunctuality ; Diana was always down in good time at home.

" Procrastination," Albinia remarked every morning when Diana appeared, " is the thief of other people's time ! "

To which Diana would retort sweetly that so long as he didn't steal hers she was keeping her hair on, and advised Albinia to do the same, which Albinia seemed to consider a veiled attack on what she prided herself was a still perfectly good head of hair, and I generally had to make the peace. As my own was inclined to a slight thinning at the

temples, I could sympathize with a sensitiveness on the subject.

The letter had been forwarded under cover by my man, Rickman, with an explanatory note that it had been dropped unstamped in my letter-box the previous afternoon, and as it was marked urgent, he thought it best to send it on at once. The envelope was addressed to "Mr. Goodlake", in block letters, without address, and on opening it I found it had no beginning and ran as follows, written in the same block letters, so carefully formed as to be devoid of all characteristic indications :—

If you want the anser to the riddell go to La Turbie,—160, Place de la Montagne. A house pink-washed with green shutters. You will get a surprise, and certain information if you go yourself—and alone.

SOMEONE WHO KNOWS SOMETHING.

My first impulse was to toss it aside with a contemptuous flick—but of course I didn't.

That's the worst of anonymous letters—they stick. Also, this was not in the nature of a thrust in the dark, a sinister attempt to damage someone's character, but an effort on the part of an individual who wished to remain in the background, to give information which might be useful.

My second impulse was to show it to Albinia but from this I also refrained. It would serve no purpose. If she gave me advice about it I shouldn't take it, because, to tell the truth, I knew at the back of my mind from the moment I first read it, I should go. Bertram Goodlake had stayed at Monte Carlo

not so many years previously—and had written as though he found the place attractive, and a great many of his sketches had been made there; and Monte Carlo lay just below La Turbie perched high on the mountain-side above.

I had made up my mind before Diana appeared, and, having finished breakfast, rang up Rickman and told him to see about my passport being viséed and so on, before confiding in my wife, who, however, was quite in accord with my intention.

"I shall run down there at once—the train won't be crowded at this time of year—and stop a couple of nights, or perhaps more if I find myself up against anything worth following up. And I shan't say anything about it to the inspector till I get back. It may be a wild-goose chase, and after Albinia's pantomime we don't want anything further in that line."

"It's what he ought to have done himself ages ago," Diana scoffed gently.

"What do you mean?"

"Found out all there is to find out—without the help of anonymous letters. If we have got to find everything out ourselves what's the sense of paying the police? And I am to be left here alone with Albinia?" she asked with a note of defiance in her voice.

I laughed. "There's Peter," I said, half-heartedly, I admit, "and Albinia'll be all right—chastened a bit, I fancy, after her adventure."

"If I can't stick her, I shall run away with Dr. Delmico," she replied gravely.

"All right," I assented, "you had better come to Monte Carlo. It will be quite in the fashion.

But I expect you to keep your eyes open here for anything that may turn up; to tell the truth, I don't much care about the Delmico man—even though you are going to run away with him; he's too jolly inquisitive."

With this she warmly agreed.

"I found him looking over everybody's letters in the rack the other day. I wish he would ask me about my dreams—I would give him something to think about!" she said thoughtfully.

I laughed. "I am sure you would! Now, Diana," I added earnestly, "I am going to leave the key of the house with you in case anything turns up, but I ask you to promise me faithfully you won't go there alone during my absence. I shan't have a moment's rest unless you promise me this. Now don't tell me it's soppy—because I don't care a hang if it is! I don't want you to go to the place alone while I am away, in any circumstances whatsoever."

Diana made a rebellious face at me and proceeded to powder her nose.

"If you go alone to Monte Carlo, I don't see why I shouldn't go alone to High Oaks. But if I do go I promise I will take somebody with me—the professor possibly," she added, looking at me gravely. "If only Mr. Farjohn were here I might have taken him," she added.

"If you are trying to make me jealous you are off the bull's-eye every time," I rejoined, "and Farjohn has probably gone for keeps. You can take Peter."

"Peter——" she began, but apparently thought better of what she was going to say, and finished:

"Who is playing tricks with the King's English now?"

"It doesn't matter for me. It's on your young lips it appears unsuitable."

"It's all right if they're lipsticked," she retorted. "That's one reason we do it—you can say almost anything, and nobody is surprised."

"Well, don't go to High Oaks alone, Diana——" and I suppose in making the request something must have stolen into my eyes, because she promised, and sealed the promise with an unsolicited kiss—which was going to great lengths for Diana.

Looking back now, I wonder I reacted to that letter so readily, because I don't think I expected anything very valuable in the way of results. On close inspection, it betrayed the writer through the very method adopted to ensure disguise. The words "anser" and "riddell" indicated a degree of illiteracy contradicted by use of the expression "a pink-washed house." The truly illiterate would have called it briefly, "a pink house."

There was, perhaps, a certain romance in this summons to a mysterious dwelling at so romantic a spot as La Turbie, but above all, where the evidence had proved so scanty and the police appeared to be doing so little, any stone that might yield the smallest result was worth crossing the Channel to turn. Dawkins's seafaring nephew crossed my mind. Was he by chance the mysterious individual who would open the door when I knocked at 160, Place de la Montagne? Sailors established their domestic hearths in many outlying quarters of the globe. The nephew might have married a French woman and settled in his

wife's native country, or he might have served chiefly in Mediterranean waters, found a home within reasonable reach more convenient, and settled there for good and all.

I was inclined to think it *was* the seafaring nephew who had laboriously penned the nameless letter, in spite of the more sophisticated word "pink-washed" and on the strength of it resolved to run up in the car to the Dawkins homestead before leaving on my pilgrimage. I could not cross until the following day anyhow.

But the enterprise bore no result. I found both Dawkins and his wife at home, and the former willing enough to speak, but his wife intervened every time the man opened his mouth.

"Don't you say nothin', Dawkins," she adjured in tones that would have successfully drowned anything the man might have attempted to say. "You've got into trouble enough already with that there Scotland Yard, and they tell yer anything you say will be used against yer—so if you say nothing they can't use it. Why do you want to know where Charlie Dawkins lives?" she snapped, turning her fire on me instead of her husband, "I'll bet it's for no good reason."

"At all events it's for no bad one," I protested in as conciliatory a manner as possible. "You must be as anxious as we all are to clear up this mystery, Mrs. Dawkins. I merely asked a civil question as to where your husband's nephew had his home. Perhaps he is at sea at the moment?" That would put him out of court so far as writing the missive found in my letter-box was concerned.

Dawkins got as far as a shake of the head before his wife's flood of remonstrance overwhelmed him again.

"Don't you be a fool, and give anything away!" she cried—one might almost say screamed—"Charlie Dawkins's whereabouts ain't no business of yours! You'll be putting the police on his track—that's what you'll be doing, and then everything *he* says 'ull be used against him. Don't you say a word!"

"But," I remonstrated, "if it can be proved he was at sea at the time of the murder that would show he could have had nothing to do with it—not the contrary, wouldn't it?"

"I don't care what it would prove—everything 'e said would be used against 'im all the same," she reiterated; "the police themselves says so—and Charlie's a good boy, and it isn't for his uncle to be 'elping the police, that's wot I says!"

"But I am not the police, Mrs. Dawkins. I only——"

"You ain't a bad imitation anyways—walkin' about with that plain clothes inspector man, who hasn't even the honesty to put on his uniform, asking questions about wot doesn't concern him, leading folks on to talk, and then usin' wot they says against them, poking his nose into honest folks' business, hinuending this and that—wot time was it, Mrs. Dawkins, when you did that?—and wot time was it when you did the other?—and who 'ad the key, and who 'adn't?—and was——"

"By the way, Mrs. Dawkins," I boldly stemmed the torrent of words, "how long had you and Dawkins been caretakers at High Oaks? Were you

in charge of the house when Mr. Goodlake came home on previous occasions?"

Mrs. Dawkins eyed me cautiously.

"Yes," she said at last, "we was."

"Did he ever bring anyone back with him—a secretary, for instance?"

Dawkins, catching my eye, shook his head.

"Don't you be in a 'urry, Dawkins," his wife adjured. "Depends on what you call a sekketary," she added to me.

"Well—" I began. It was not quite easy to explain off-hand.

"If a black boy, same as one o' them golliwogs can be called a sekketary, 'e brought one 'ome with 'im time before last—and I give 'im a bit o' my mind," Mrs. Dawkins went on, rocking backwards and forwards on her chair. "I told Mr. Goodlake, I did, that if 'e thought I was agoing to cook dinners for niggers, 'e could guess again 'e could. I was a Christian woman, born in a Christian land, and 'is nigger boy could starve before I'd demean meself by cooking of his meals. Dawkins 'ere quite agreed with me," she ended abruptly, with a dramatic flourish of one hand in her husband's direction.

Dawkins preserved a strictly neutral attitude.

"And *did* the nigger boy starve?" I asked, merely as a matter of curiosity.

"'Ow should I know? Mr. Goodlake took 'im to London next day, and that was the end of 'im so far as I was concerned. He never brought another with 'im, not when 'e came 'ome next time," she observed reminiscently, "knew better. I don't 'old with niggers."

"The Almighty made them," I felt called upon to expostulate.

"So they say," was the non-committal reply, "but I don't 'old with 'em."

"If your husband's nephew should happen to live abroad," I suggested, by way of throwing out another feeler, "I am thinking of going over to France for a day or two—to Monaco that is—and if you would like to send a message of any sort——" At the look in her eye I tailed off weakly.

"Dawkins ain't got no messages for 'is nephew," was the terse rejoinder.

I was nonplussed. It seemed to me important to learn if the writer of that letter could have been this seafaring relative, as, if it were so, it would definitely involve the caretakers in the murder; it would point to some inner knowledge on their part hitherto kept to themselves. If "Someone Who Knows Something" could be identified with the seaman, it might be wiser to inform the inspector of the facts before I started on the pilgrimage to Monaco, in order that he might redouble the vigilance I believed him to be already keeping over Dawkins and his wife.

On the other hand, if I could extort anything from the dour lady opposite, still rocking rhythmically to and fro without ever removing her bead-like eyes from my face, that "let out" the nephew, I should carry out my original plan and keep silent until I discovered what was at the back of the anonymous communication.

"How long is it since you saw your nephew?" I asked tentatively. "I suppose he always comes to see you when he comes ashore?"

The beady eyes blinked at me, and Dawkins coughed discreetly behind a grimy hand.

I drew a treasury note from my pocket and let it crackle in my fingers. It was a new one.

Mrs. Dawkins ceased her rocking abruptly, and transferred her stony gaze to where the crackle came from.

Dawkins rose from his chair and addressed his wife.

"Look 'ere, Bet," he began, "when a gent comes civil-like asking questions *like* a gent, why can't yer give 'im an answer? There ain't no sort o' sense——" he went on persuasively—but it was immediately evident that no persuasion further than the crackle of the note was necessary. In exactly the same tone of voice with the same set stare of the beady eyes, Mrs. Dawkins proceeded to give me all the information I had been asking for in a voluble stream of words.

"Charlie Dawkins ain't at sea and 'e ain't been in these parts for a matter o' two months. He's married and 'as three children and 'is 'ome is in Liverpool. I don't 'old with furrin parts, and I don't 'old with marrying a gal what powders 'er face and 'as golden 'air as might have come out of a pantomime. I says to 'im on 'is wedding-day, I says: 'She'll let yer down as sure as eggs is eggs. These gals what marries sailors—'ere to-day and gone ter-morrer——"

But at that point, as Mrs. Dawkins showed no signs of running down, I placed the treasury note on the table and left abruptly, having secured the information I required through the diplomatic production of the note. If the nephew was married

and lived so far north as Liverpool it was eminently improbable he was the author of the letter, or even in touch with the nameless individual who was waiting for me at La Turbie. But I was glad to have made the inquiry, as it definitely cleared Charlie Dawkins. With a little patience the question should be settled in a few days.

It seemed Diana had a mission for me of her own. She suggested that I should look round and see if there was a villa likely to be available for a few weeks in January or February. She thought the prospect of a bit of sunshine during those two dreary months would be rather pleasant, and I was quite ready to fall in with the idea and make inquiries.

So, assuring her that the inside of a week would see me back, I left for Monaco, resolving to make a clean breast of it to the inspector either by cable or immediately on my return, if there should be anything to tell. But if nothing of importance transpired I should feel a bit of a fool for having crossed Europe, as one might say, at the call of an anonymous letter, and the less said about it the better.

For the same reason I said nothing to Albinia.

Considering the circumstances, I found the journey pleasant enough, although rather warm. It was a complete change from the incessant gossip of the hotel and, to tell the truth, I was getting tired of the daily intercourse with the so-called professor and the prosy major who had been something in the Indian police. My eagerness to solve the mystery of my cousin's death had not abated, but we seemed no nearer the solution than we had been at the beginning.

The " clue " had so far proved as elusive as ever. There was not a corner of the house that I could think of that had not been explored either by myself or Diana, with Mrs. Vaughan generally in attendance. The whole thing seemed such a hopeless tangle, and my brain searched in vain for light as I watched the landscape of France, so different from the forest trees and green fields of England, fade into greys and purples, tall slender poplars standing sentinel over the wide stretches of flat, unbroken country, while dusk heralded the approach of night by throwing a soft veil over it all.

And then to wake in the morning and find the Mediterranean blinking at you through the windows of the train, dancing with dazzling morning light, bluer than the blue sky above it—and green-shuttered houses, walls hung with bougainvillæa and blazing creepers, and bright green palm trees waving lazy, fanlike leaves in the breeze.

I arrived at Monaco a little after 4 o'clock, feeling a bit shop-soiled, and glad to think of a bath within reasonable distance. A suit-case in my hand constituted my luggage, and I descended from the train—and in France, with a game leg, it *is* a descent—on to the platform, and stood looking round at the crowd about me before setting out for the hotel. Monte Carlo and I were on fairly familiar terms, and I had cabled for a room to an hotel I knew well.

As I stood there, a man brushed past me, so close as to knock his hand against my suit-case. He was apparently in a hurry. He beckoned to a porter, said something to him, and made for the exit into the street.

On reaching the barrier he turned his head to glance at the station clock which was directly behind me. I recognized him instantly.

It was Farjohn! I looked him straight in the face, but he did not appear to see me.

The next moment he had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI

THAT Farjohn's should be the first face to confront me on arrival at the little principality where the Queen of Chance holds high revel the year round, gave me something of a shock. When the mind is running along a set channel it is apt to regard every fresh incident that arises as a mere tributary to the main stream ; whereas it may possibly have no bearing whatsoever upon the focus of interest.

That Farjohn's presence in Monte Carlo might be quite unrelated to the business that had brought me across the Channel, and was possibly no more than coincidence, never for a moment struck me. The question that immediately presented itself was—could Albinia have been on the right track after all ?

With the flashing sequence along which the brain can travel with the lightning speed of the spark along a trail of gunpowder, several other questions presented themselves.

Had Farjohn anything to do with the anonymous letter ? Was it he who would answer the door to me at 160, Place de la Montagne ?

Or was he flying from justice—having taken alarm at Albinia's action, and was my unforeseen arrival at Monte Carlo to be regarded from his point of view as a bit of pure bad luck ?

I was inclined to accept the last alternative. Monte Carlo would be an excellent jumping-off place, for in the cosmopolitan crowd generally assembled there, it should be easy to rub along without attracting too much attention while plans matured or schemes were elaborated for a discreet change of identity.

Then again, if Farjohn were the man we were seeking, who had once held the position of secretary to my cousin, Bertram Goodlake—and of course this conjecture had immediately followed the suspicion that he was trying to elude justice—he would be as familiar with Monte Carlo and all its possibilities for concealment as the palm of his hand. For Monaco had been one of my cousin's favourite places of resort. Involuntarily I found my mind playing with the possibility that Albinia's idea might have had something in it.

I walked up the hill from the station to the hotel, carrying my suit-case, now and then getting a glimpse of the Condamine away down on the right, thinking hard. The sun was getting low in the sky, but the roofs of the town below still glowed brilliantly with every shade of red from rose-pink to scarlet, broken by the cool grey-green of olive trees, or a wide, spreading palm, its feathery leaves conspicuous against white or yellow-washed walls. Green shutters; faint trails of grey-blue smoke rising in delicate spirals towards the unbroken blue of the sky; and beyond, the Rock with its burden of age-old dwelling houses and narrow streets, its soft green shadows, and the palace of its ruler crowning all; a gem set in a sea of turquoise and emerald.

Even with so much worry and perplexity my mind refused to turn a blind eye to the radiant beauty of the scene.

By the time I reached the hotel, perched high above the town, I had come to a decision as to an immediate line of action.

After a cup of tea I would take a stroll round the town on the chance—a meagre one, I was forced to admit—of running into Farjohn again, and extracting from him then and there an explanation of his presence in the place. I could almost swear he had not seen me at the station; I had stared straight into his face, but his eyes had never strayed from the clock over my head during the brief glance he had thrown at it, and he had turned away without betraying the faintest sign of surprise or recognition.

After dinner I would drop into the Casino with the same object. I should have to pay my footing but it would be worth it. If, as I thought probable, my visit to the place were to extend to three or four days, there was no hunting-ground likely to yield better results than the green baize tables. If by chance the man I was after had the gambler's instinct—and an adventurer of his type was more likely to have it than not—he would answer to the lure of the croupier's monotonous chant as certainly as any Ulysses to siren. Anyway it was worth a trial and would fill in the time; for the local time-table told me the trains to and from La Turbie were infrequent, and it was too late in any case to start investigations in a neighbourhood with which I was unfamiliar. A dim recollection of a small town of red-roofed houses, open air cafés

and a wide square, bordered by half-grown trees, perched among high hills, with a large modern hotel standing on the brow of a cliff was all that had remained in my memory of passing through La Turbie in a car.

Drinking tea on the wide balcony of the hotel in Monaco, eyes on a level with the tops of palms and mimosa trees just below, I weighed the advisability of dispatching a cable to Inspector Drewsbury conveying the information only that Farjohn was in Monte Carlo.

Had I acted on a first impulse I should have done so, but second thoughts bade me pause.

Suppose for a moment it *had* been mere coincidence that had brought us face to face ? We had already played the fool with Farjohn once, and his sudden departure may well have been disgust at the trick played upon him, and a natural desire to put miles between himself and a lady of doubtful judgment on whom it would serve no purpose to retaliate. If I were to send the cable I might be putting the police for the second time on to a presumably innocent man without a shred of evidence against him to justify it.

Then, the inspector did not know that I myself was in Monte Carlo. He might well resent the suppression of the anonymous letter. I was not at all sure in fact at what point exactly an act of *suppressio veri* might not find itself transformed from a sin of omission into a sin of commission—against the law of England, and I become guilty of being an accessory after the fact. If my journey across to France were to blossom into fruit, and inquiries at 160, Place de la Montagne shed light on the

affair, I should immediately place my information in the hands of the police. But if it turned out that my anonymous correspondent had nothing useful to impart, where was the point of mentioning it at all? I should only find myself a butt for the clumsy wit of Dr. Delmico with his nonsense about dreams, and Major Forsythe, who rammed the Indian police and their advanced methods down our throats until we were sick of them.

So I decided not to cable; nor would I have any dealings with the police on the spot if I could help it. How far the Paris Sûreté was linked up with Scotland Yard—if at all—I had no idea, but though a Briton may have a profound respect for the red tape of his own country, he is inclined to regard that of others with insular distrust, and to give it as wide a berth as possible.

Therefore I resolved to let events shape themselves, and to conduct this particular development of the case in my own way. After all, the letter was addressed to me and not to Inspector Drewsbury.

I carried out the programme without any successful result. I saw no more of Farjohn, though I sauntered through the streets, descending by precipitous steps to the Condamine, to mount again by easy stages along the road overlooking the blue waters of the harbour, past the post office to the terraces hanging between the Casino and the sea. There were people in plenty, crowding the streets, and taking their ease in the last rays of sunshine on the seats on the terrace, but not a face among them all that I recognized.

There is an allure about Monte Carlo that seems to be quite unjustified by the reality.

That perhaps is just it—the sense of *un*reality—of being plunged into the heart of musical comedy—something on the stage.

The white balustrades bordering flights of steps and hung with bougainvillæa, with plumbago, with roses red and white ; scarlet geraniums, hedges of them, blots of vivid colour against white and pink-washed walls ; plants with spiky leaves in pots, and oleanders in green tubs, drenching the air with sweetness ; the beds in the Casino gardens, dazzling in the sunshine, not a leaf or blossom out of place, ready to be taken up and replaced by others as the seasons changed. And everywhere, singly or in clumps, the palm trees, hall-mark of the semi-tropics, waving feathery branching fronds, or standing motionless as " property " trees in the still warm air.

One could almost expect the gendarme, of whom one might ask the way, to throw his cloak back over a shoulder, place hand on heart, and break into the vocal rhapsodies that the slightest encouragement seems to evoke on the operatic stage !

I lingered on the terrace, enjoying it all and gazing at the blue water below ; the Rock, over which a thin violet haze was gathering, the yachts moored here and there, butterflies among the fishing boats and small craft, built obviously for use rather than ornament, and wished Diana were with me.

She was never really out of my thoughts. It seemed sometimes too wonderful to be true that she should have given so freely her youth and loveliness, zest for living, generosity, and passion for straightforward dealing, which is the surest

basis for a fine character, to me—who, whatever I might feel in the way of capacity and vitality unimpaired, was on the edge of forty and had of necessity lost something of the resilience and freshness of outlook which is the birthright of earlier years.

I resolved to send her a cable which she would get in the morning; just love and cheerio sort of thing, to let her know I was still alive and thinking of her. Even the young generation could hardly call that "soppy." None of them seem to object to being thought about.

So I dropped in at the post office, sent the message, returned to the hotel, and looked out a morning train for La Turbie.

I then dined beside an open window looking into a paved court. Palm leaves pointed scarcely-moving fingers to a sky that, having cast its mantle of cerulean and emerald with the startling rapidity of a theatrical "quick-change," was now assuming one of soft indigo, pierced by twinkling stars. The electric lights in the dining-room, throwing here and there an artificial glint on the palm trees, added to the suggestion of a scene on the stage rather than real life.

Having dined, I carried out the second part of my programme, and strolled down to the Casino.

The gardens, dotted with flower-beds displaying every sort of colour, and flanked by palms so motionless they might have been cut out of cardboard, everything brilliantly illuminated by electric lights, added to the illusion of a light opera setting; one had a feeling the palm trees were stuck rootless in the grass, the vivid blooms scarcely real, the

men and women, with their gestures and loud laughter, figures on a stage, actors in a play of which I, too, was a part. Very delightful, very artificial and probably superficial, but stimulating after the semi-somnolence of an English country town. With all my interest in the passing scene I kept a vigilant eye for the man of whom I had caught so brief a glimpse at the station.

The tables were not over-crowded, owing, I supposed, to its being the slack time of the year. The faces with their varied expressions, bent over the green baize, were typical of many countries, un-English for the most part, swaying rhythmically to the croupier's chant: "*Faites vos jeux, Messieurs et Mesdames*," bringing forth an epidemic of little bunches of counters on the green baize, pink, green, round, oblong—eager eyes dwelling hopefully or greedily on each bid for fortune.

Then the inexorable rake, sweeping here, there, swallowing its prey, and a few swiftly-moving hands gathering in their own, and the croupier beginning his song again.

Without any of the gambler's instinct, a turn at the game on occasion has always amused me, but at the moment I was out of tune with it all. The inner *salle* yielded nothing, and I sauntered back through the "kitchen," scanning every face at all the various tables in turn. Here also I drew a blank, and finally wandered down the steps for a turn on the terrace before giving up the quest as hopeless. It certainly amounted to looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, and I might be using my time more advantageously elsewhere.

The service for the small town perched high

among the mountains at the back of Monaco has a station to itself, quite apart from the main railway line. I found myself gazing from the window at hill-sides scarred with grey or brown rock, clothed with the soft grey-green and gnarled stems of olive groves, a brilliant blue sea for background, and Monte Carlo receding far below, while the engine puffed and snorted itself slowly along a rapidly ascending way. It bore a fair load of passengers, for the weather was not oppressively hot, and there were sightseers among them as well as the ordinary inhabitants.

The run terminated with a final sweep round the head of a long valley, and the engine did it with an air, dashing along the line as though to snort and pant up laborious miles had never been a part of its daily duty, and we found ourselves decanted on to a small station with the hotel looming high on the hill beyond.

I went straight there, lunched, and started off on my quest for number 160, Place de la Montagne, with the letter from my anonymous correspondent in my pocket.

Such a thing as a taxi was not to be had, nor any less sophisticated mode of conveyance, and it is surprising what a lot of walking even a small town can exact when it is unfamiliar ground and lucid directions are hard to come by.

At the hotel itself I could get no information; the manager was away and the waiters apparently hired temporarily to relieve the regular staff in the relatively slack season. A visitor with a car was kind enough to give me a lift into the town, but could give no further help with regard to my

objective. Facing the central square, a mere gravelled space, a respectable café offered a possible answer to inquiries, and I entered it with hope of getting directions.

Now that I was almost in sight, as one might say, of the quarry, I was conscious of a growing excitement. Who could say what sort of revelation might not be awaiting me ?—information perhaps which would solve the whole problem— who had murdered Bertram Goodlake—what had become of the jewels that were at the root of the crime—and last but not least, to anyone capable of a justifiable curiosity, where and what was the clue that lay hidden at High Oaks ?

The inspector, it seemed, was doing very little, or had met with scant success. My unknown correspondent knew and had virtually promised "an anser to the riddell." Should I, too, know the answer before the hour was out ?

In response to a question in the ordinary Englishman's French, the young woman in charge of the café shook her head.

"Non, monsieur," she replied, frowning in the effort to recall, "I do not know Place de la Montagne."

She looked stupid enough not to know anything, but I distrusted my own French sufficiently to make allowances. So I tried again, twisting the inquiry into a different form, and asked for a cup of coffee. She understood that all right, and when brought, I seated myself at a table under an awning between the café and the street, and repeated the question.

"I should be so much obliged if you would direct me to Place de la Montagne," I nodded

towards the mountain rising abruptly behind the town; the pink-washed house I was looking for would probably be under its shadow.

"Sais pas," was all the answer I got.

I tried a third time, and remembering the plan of campaign that had succeeded with the Dawkinses, I placed a ten-franc note conspicuously on the table. Her eyes glistened—big sheep's eyes they were—and for a moment I thought the lethargic organ behind them, that she would possibly imagine was a brain, was going to be stimulated into a spasmodic activity.

But apparently there was nothing doing. I repeated my inquiry in the loud, clear tones of the exasperated Briton, but a shake of the head indicative of a stony indifference was all the change I got. So, pocketing the note and paying for the coffee the strict market price, I turned my back on this specimen of Gallic stupidity, and transferred my inquiries to a youth delivering bread in the street outside.

Quite ready to embark on conversation, he put down his basket, removed his cap and wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his blouse; by its condition evidently not for the first time.

"Place de la Montrane?" he repeated after me, "mais oui——"

"Montagne," I corrected.

"Oui, monsieur," he said again, "the mountain is close behind—at the back of the town—voyez—" he caught me by the elbow and pointed up a street on the right. "Two turns to the left—then the right—and voilà—on est la!" he finished.

I was too, pretty well, by the time I carried out

his directions—finished I mean—and to my disgust found myself, sure enough, in Rue Montrane, with about six houses on each side of it, and the mountain rising at the back. Determined to give up these desultory inquiries and adopt a more methodical procedure, I asked the way to the nearest post office; about that building at least there could be no ambiguity.

The postmaster was busy behind the counter, and at my inquiry looked at me over a pair of horn spectacles which he removed and rubbed on his sleeve as he spoke.

"Place de la Montagne?" he repeated, frowning, "never heard of it, monsieur."

I in my turn frowned back.

"But my good man," I protested, "you must have heard of it! Are you postmaster here?"

"I am it," he replied with a hint of pomposity.

"Then you can surely tell me where Place de la Montagne is."

"On the contrary, monsieur, I can only tell you where it is *not*—and that is in La Turbie," he answered, replacing the spectacles and glaring at me over the rims.

It was at this moment that the first horrid doubt crept into my brain, and having lodged there, I repeated more firmly than ever:

"But there must be a Place de la Montagne in La Turbie! I have had a letter from that address—number 160."

"Non, monsieur," he said curtly, and turned back to his business.

I find it very difficult to keep my temper and speak French at the same time. My voice was,

however, fairly under control, as I made the final appeal.

"Do you mean to tell me as a fact, there is no such place as Place de la Montagne in La Turbie?" I asked slowly.

"I have been postmaster here for fifteen years, monsieur and, sacré Nom! should I not know what there is or is not in this town?" he replied without troubling to turn again in my direction. "I tell you as a fact—there is no such place as the Place de la Montagne in La Turbie—and never has been! What *will* be, it is for the bon Dieu to say," but as I had no interest in the bon Dieu's future arrangements for La Turbie, I turned and left the building, feeling as if the bottom had fallen out of the world.

CHAPTER XXII

TO describe my frame of mind on returning to the hotel as crestfallen is vastly to understate the case; and yet I became aware that all through the search since arriving at Monte Carlo—not before—there had lingered on the surface of my brain a shadowy, half-formed phantom of doubt as to whether investigations at the address given would lead to anything.

Not that it had struck me that the Place de la Montagne was a myth. But I fancied vaguely, and without definitely following it up, that whoever might be waiting for me at La Turbie would possibly make an attempt to lead me off the scent; to give me false information with the object of misleading the police, and I knew, moreover, the impression first had birth at the sight of Farjohn on the platform of Monaco station.

Without putting it into words, I had instantly connected him—vaguely and with no more reason behind it than an instinctive rejection of the mere coincidence theory—with the anonymous letter. The triangle seemed to point to something more or less suggestive—Farjohn, the address given by the unknown correspondent, and myself—all focused on the same spot! Surely the situation should have a key to it, if I could only find it. If Farjohn were flying from justice, why should he be respon-

sible for the letter, or even connected with it indirectly, for surely the last place to which he would wish to draw me would be the spot to which he had presumably fled in an attempt to evade the police ? As I walked up the drive to the hotel entrance after my fruitless journey up the mountain I was still worrying over the problem, and in the effort to piece the puzzle together and make Farjohn and the anonymous letter fit into one another, I overlooked the more serious cause for anxiety which was to assail me later on, and give me some of the most feverishly miserable hours I ever remember spending.

I must not let it be imagined that I at any time had been blind to the possibility of danger to myself lurking behind the anonymous call. That idea had certainly entered my mind ; I was glad it had not entered Diana's or she would have made trouble about the journey and possibly insisted on coming herself. It was at the back of my mind when I determined to come to Monte Carlo alone, and never suggested she should accompany me. There had been a little sting in her ready acquiescence—if Peter Lanham had been busy over his duties in London instead of kicking his heels and running after some fictitious clue in the Paignhamstead Arms, Diana might not have been so contented to be left behind.

But as I thought I knew it was nonsense—my Diana ! If she liked to run about with an old playmate I was a crabbed old fool to mind !

So this more poignant anxiety was further postponed by the sight of a letter from her awaiting me at the porter's desk in the hall. I had hardly expected to hear from her, and blessed her from my

heart for taking the chance of catching me before I started on the return journey. On second thoughts I remembered it had been sure to catch me. I had spent the night in South Hans Square before leaving Victoria by the Continental express, so had had twenty-four hours' start of the letter, and I was bound to give a whole day to my explorations at La Turbie.

The sight of her clear, characteristic handwriting with its firm, rounded lines and block letter capitals, cheered me at the end of a day that had been thoroughly disappointing. With all her professed contempt for sentimental avowals, it was like her to send me a line to say she was safe and well, and perhaps missing me a bit.

Not only was there a letter from Diana but a square envelope addressed in Albinia's angular writing was disclosed as I lifted the first. That would keep—very good of Albinia to write, but from my experience she never wrote letters unless she had something rather disagreeable to say. She had probably instituted herself watch-dog over the morals of all and sundry under the hotel roof, and I felt quite sure the letter would disclose somebody's delinquencies. I wondered what she would say when she heard I had let Farjohn slip through my fingers for the second time! Not that I had had any choice; he had vanished almost before I realized he was there.

As for that, it was not I who had let him go previously. Albinia had herself to thank.

I slipped into the empty smoking-room and read the letter sitting by an open window.

The first part of it was nobody's business except

Diana's and mine. The rest of it—and it was quite a long letter—bore on the case. As I read I smiled and frowned alternately.

". . . Albinia and I had words last night, (so the letter ran). I invited Mona Vaughan to sit at our table—you couldn't have expected me, Goody darling, to stand Albinia undiluted all through the meal, and she and Peter only glare at one another—but she evidently resented Mrs. Vaughan's presence, and donned the whole armour of martyrdom which she knows so well how to assume. Also she didn't know where you had disappeared to, nor why, and spent her time through dinner in trying to find out, without betraying her ignorance to Mona Vaughan.

" Finally I considered it best to tell her the facts. Everyone knows it is wrong to tell a lie as if it was the truth, but it's quite all right to tell the truth as if it was a lie, and it answers the purpose equally well.

" So I adopted this latter course and said you had gone to Monte Carlo.

" Albinia gaped !—and even Peter sniggered.

" ' Monte Carlo ! ' she exclaimed, ' I don't believe a word of it ! What on earth would Humphrey want to go to Monte Carlo for—just now, of all times ? '

" I elegantly shrugged a shoulder. ' Paignhamstead is all very well in its way,' I said gently, ' but I can easily understand a man preferring Monte Carlo. After all, a turn at the tables *is* a change from the simple life of a country town.'

" You know Albinia's views on gambling. She drew back—metaphorically—like a cobra about to strike, but Mona Vaughan saved the situation.

"'I am glad to hear Mr. Goodlake has gone to Monte Carlo,' she said evenly, 'because there is a rumour in the hotel that he has been arrested for the murder of his cousin and been taken up to London as quietly as possible to avoid scandal.'

"I laughed; but, to my surprise, got no response. Mona appeared to be serious.

"'Do you mean that?' I asked.

"'That there is a rumour?—yes,' she replied. 'It was all over the hotel before dinner. Whether there is any truth in it or not, of course I don't know. I, for one, don't believe it for a moment. If he has gone to Monte Carlo, as you say, why, there's the answer—if you really mean it?'

"'Of course I mean it!' was my rejoinder; I suppose I oughtn't to have given it away, as you told me not, but a saint from Heaven couldn't have remained silent with a rumour like that going about! 'Who started the rumour?'

"'Don't bark at me like that,' she laughed, and Peter murmured: 'What awful tosh!' If I looked as fierce as I felt her remark was excusable. 'I didn't start it. I rather think it was Dr. Delmico, he had a dream or something. But everyone will know it's not true when your husband comes back, so what does it matter? How long is he going to be at Monte Carlo?'

"'A day or two at most,' I replied.

"Albinia put down her spoon and fork with a rattle.

"'Then he *is* at Monte Carlo!' she said sharply.

"'Of course he is!' I answered suavely, 'I told you so.'

"'But I thought you didn't mean it,' she protested, looking aggrieved.

"'I can't help what you *think*,' I replied. 'If you choose to put your own interpretations on to things, it isn't my fault. I always tell the truth, Albinia.'

"'I hope you always *will*,' she said acidly.

"'But not always *all* of it—or probably you and I wouldn't be on speaking terms,' and after a pause to allow that to sink in, I added: 'Now, I suppose half the hotel will believe Humphrey is at Monte Carlo, and the other half that he is in the jug!' and I left her audibly resolving to look out 'jug' in the New Oxford Dictionary.

"This morning Mona Vaughan and I walked up to High Oaks. I promised you I wouldn't go there alone and I didn't. I would have taken Peter but he was off on his own again. We were only there a few minutes. The place seemed so horribly quiet. I never could bear to live there, and I hope you will sell it for anything it will fetch, which probably won't be much with such a sinister record behind it. Mona had dropped her beauty bag somewhere on the premises, and while she looked for it I sat in the library and pictured the whole gruesome scene over again. Morbid you'll call it. Perhaps—but there is something about the place that won't let you get away from it—the poor old man sitting there, writing the letter to you, drinking his coffee and never thinking of the enemy skulking out there in the darkness. It was a hot evening, and he couldn't stand the window shut, I expect—in spite of knowing the secretary was going to get him if he could—and then the shot—and oblivion!—at least so far as this world is concerned!

"Odd he should have fallen forward like that,

and concealed the letter with his body! Otherwise you may be sure you would never have got it, and it certainly made a difference to one's attitude. It seemed almost as if Providence had arranged it to prevent the murderer getting it and destroying it. The first letter seemed to be a joke; you thought so yourself. But in the second there was a more serious note—and I for one will never be persuaded the secretary didn't do it!—I do hope he hasn't got the emeralds!

"We only remained at High Oaks a few minutes. Mona found her bag in one of the upstair rooms where we had been searching for the 'clue', and I didn't feel as if I wanted to go on with the hunt without you, so we went back to the hotel.

"If Dr. Delmico did start that rumour I'll give him a bit of my mind to weave into his dreams and turn them into nightmares for some time to come!

"And all the time I am wondering what you found at 160, Place de la Montagne, and whether it will be any good and help us on towards the answer to the riddle. I *should* like to beat that inspector-man at his own game! . . ."

I smiled. To beat the police at their own game would take a bit of doing, and my enterprise had done little to forward that desirable end. Never had journey proved more fruitless. I had carried out my programme without any result at all—including the visit to the Casino after dinner the previous evening; I meant to repeat it in the hope of spotting Farjohn; all so far had been to no purpose.

"The inspector," the letter went on, "came to

the hotel this morning and asked for you. He was told you were not at Paignhamstead, and he asked where you were. They said they didn't know, and he asked for me. I wondered if he had come about Albinia's escapade and that Mr. Farjohn had lodged a complaint. So I went cautiously.

"'Where is Mr. Goodlake, madam?' he asked, coldly aloof as he has always been since I got into High Oaks through the hole in the fence without asking his permission.

"'I don't know,' I replied, offering him a cigarette which he stiffly refused. So I lit one for myself to mark time.

"'How do you mean, you don't know?' he asked sharply. 'I want to speak to him.'

"'I am sure he would have altered all his plans if he had known that,' I replied sweetly, and he waited for me to say something more, but I didn't. I wanted him to show his hand first.

"'And you mean to tell me you don't know where he is?' he repeated in the hectoring sort of way that gets my back up.

"'It's no good talking to me in that everything-you-say-will-be-used-against-you sort of voice,' I protested. 'I can't tell you exactly where he is, because I don't know—that's to say not whether he's indoors or out, or in a train or a motor—or even a boat or a flying machine—or possibly a 'bus. He may be in any of them, and as he is not a criminal he has a perfect right to be anywhere he chooses—' but a glance at his face at this moment made me quite anxious about his blood pressure, and I thought it wise to add, 'if it will be of any use to you, I don't mind saying that to the best of my

belief he is at Monte Carlo, and returning here probably the day after to-morrow.'

"I can see your face, Goody, and fancy I hear you saying that the English police force is the best in the world, and that one must not defeat the ends of justice, and all the rest of it. Yes, I know, but when that inspector begins to ask his questions, which never seem to lead anywhere, even when he gets answers to them, the devil enters into me, good and plenty.

"'Monte Carlo?' he muttered, looking very astonished, 'why Monte Carlo, I wonder?'

"But that I was *not* going to tell him. The anonymous letter should remain a secret; and at this moment Dr. Delmico afforded a diversion by sauntering up from the lawn to the terrace close to where we were standing, in an endeavour to hear what we were talking about. I seized the chance.

"'Dr. Delmico says, I believe, that you have arrested my husband for the murder of his cousin, and taken him to London. Perhaps you would like to interrogate the inspector on your own account?' I turned to the doctor, '—and remember always that anything you say may——' but a glance at the inspector's speaking countenance decided me to leave the sentence unfinished, and leaving them to settle it between them, I slipped off while they were staring at one another, too astonished to notice my departure. . . ."

How the letter ended is again a matter lying entirely between Diana and myself, but I had every reason to believe I should find a welcome on my return.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN a very different frame of mind I broke open the envelope of Albinia's letter.

Of course it was kind of her to write to me, but I doubted if it was going to add to my peace of mind. I turned over the pages with reluctant fingers—it was a long letter—inclined to replace it in the envelope to be digested in the morning. But a well-established habit of grasping the nettle won the day.

"Dear Humphrey (the letter began),

"I got a shock this morning when Diana told me you had gone to Monte Carlo. In fact, I didn't believe her; I find it very difficult sometimes to know when Diana is telling the truth and when she is not—and she said it in the casual way that she might have said you had gone to Jericho. Then just when I had finally concluded it was *not* true, I discovered it *was*.

"I must confess I was surprised. You know my opinion of gambling. Aunt Emily, if you remember, used to point out how much worse it is than drinking—the gambler pacifies his conscience because he always thinks he can put things right if he gambles a little more, whereas the most confirmed drunkard cannot delude himself into thinking he can put things right by drinking a little more. When I appeared astonished that you should have chosen

this time to go to Monte Carlo, Diana said it was only to be expected you would want a change from the monotonous existence in a country town.

"Even so, it seems unnecessary to go to a hotbed of vice to find it, and I should have thought a murder, the theft of valuable emeralds, the search for a clue that I feel quite certain isn't there, the escape of the probable criminal"—I supposed she referred to Farjohn—"and constant visits from the police—although quite useless so far as catching the murderer is concerned—would be sufficient excitement to satisfy the most restless spirit. I hope the green baize tables, as I have heard them called, will not prove your ruin."

Quite a bright beginning! If it ever were possible to get hold of the wrong end of the stick Albinia was sure to do it.

"If you had to go," she went on, "surely it would have been better if Diana had gone with you! When I was a girl a wife's place was by her husband's side; I know that is all changed, and that the wife by a husband's side nowadays generally belongs to somebody else. But if you choose to go away for your own amusement and leave your young wife to find companionship among the friends of her childhood—I am making no accusations—you must not be surprised at anything that may happen. . . ."

Albinia certainly had a knack of getting her shot in! I knew she was talking nonsense, and nonsense with a sting in it at that; but the worst of it was she probably believed she was giving me a friendly warning.

"Mr. Lanham disappears from breakfast till

lunch, and from lunch till dinner, but I can't find out where he goes to. I hear his car drawing up at the front door, but before I can get there it is out of sight, and if I go and wait at the front door to see him start, he goes off from the back yard without coming round to the front at all. Diana, also, is never to be seen except at lunch and dinner, and she often asks Mrs. Vaughan—whom I don't like and never shall—to join us at our table. When I ask her where she has been she makes an evasive answer, and altogether I consider the situation very unsatisfactory.

"They are all following up different trails—so they say—which is waste of time, as that man Farjohn was the only trail worth following up, and he has been allowed to get away."

I smiled at that! Albinia had a convenient gift of shutting her eyes to anything she didn't wish to see!

"Major Forsythe agrees with me on that subject, and as his wife always agrees with him that makes two unbiased opinions on my side. He says he learnt a great deal about crime and criminals when he was in the Indian police, and that no one would have behaved as I said unless he was more or less a crook. When I repeated that to Diana—who, as you know, has always taken Farjohn's part—she said it was nonsense—either you were a crook or you were not a crook, there was no 'more or less' about it, it was like being dead—if you're dead, you're dead, although some people seem to think it necessary to describe you as *quite* dead.

"Personally, I didn't see what being dead had to do with the subject, and when I pressed her, Diana

didn't know either. It's often like that when you argue with Diana—you suddenly find you don't know what you're talking about, and it's no good going on.

"I didn't tell Major Forsythe exactly how Farjohn had escaped; I thought it better not. But it's no use saying it was my doing. I did shut him up which is more than the police did, and I didn't make the hole at the end of the vault.

"I found Mr. Lanham sitting on the terrace after lunch by himself, and thought it a good opportunity to ask a few questions. So I asked him where Diana was and he looked quite embarrassed—sheepish, I called it—and said he believed she was in her room writing letters. That might or might not be true—from the expression on his face I think it was not. I sat down on a chair opposite to him.

"'You seem very busy these days, Mr. Lanham,' I began, 'we never see you.'

"He shuffled his feet uncomfortably. 'Yes,' he said after a pause, 'I suppose I am.'

"'Following up a trail of your own, are you not?'

"'Yes,' he said after another pause, 'I suppose it might be called that.'

"'*Might* be called that?' I repeated. 'Is there anything else it could be called?' I daresay I put a little meaning into my voice, because he looked more sheepish than ever.

"'I suppose there are other things it might be called,' he admitted, and I thought he was going to sneeze, but it turned into a ghastly sort of grin.

"'I don't see anything particular to laugh about,' I remarked.

"'No more do I,' he answered gravely. I sometimes wonder if Mr. Lanham is quite right in the head.

"'Then why do you smile?' I asked.

"'Just on general principles—keep smiling—and all that sort of thing, you know.'

"I had no intention of being put off like that . . ."

That I could well believe! Albinia once started after the quarry would be stopped by nothing short of an earthquake.

"I had no intention of letting him think I didn't know how he was spending his time—entirely on your account, Humphrey, of course. I consider it my duty to look after your interests during your absence—no matter how unnecessary that absence may be. So I asked: 'What is your opinion about the emeralds? You must have some idea if you are following up a special trail?'

"He looked more confused than before and glanced over his shoulder as if he was expecting somebody.

"'I don't know that I've got any special idea,' he said slowly; then seemed to pull himself together, 'but I can tell you my methods,' and he brightened up. 'I believe in leaving no stone unturned,' he said, so impressively that I gave him all my attention. 'That, in fact, is what I am doing—turning stones. No stone should be left unturned for two reasons in an affair of this kind. First, no stone should be considered too *big* to turn, because of the difficulty of turning it; and no stone should be considered too *small* to turn because it seems unimportant. I'm sure you will agree with me there?'

"He waited for an answer, so I had to give one.

I said 'Yes,' although I didn't quite understand what he meant.

"'Then,' he paused for quite a long time while he lit a cigarette; the match went out three times; I thought he would never get it done. His hand shook rather badly, which I believe is a bad sign. I hope he doesn't drink. I must ask Diana.

"'Then,' he repeated when the cigarette was alight, 'I should turn the big stones—and the small ones—over again.'

"'What would be the good of that?' I asked. 'You mean you would put them back as you found them?'

"'No,' he replied, 'I should roll them over into a new place.'

"'Why?' I asked.

"'Because rolling stones gather no moss,' he answered very earnestly.

"'What's that got to do with it?' I asked. I was getting rather in a muddle, thinking about the stones as if they were real stones, whereas of course I knew he was speaking metaphorically.

"'It's very important in detective work,' he replied. 'You have heard of not being able to see the wood for the trees? Well, it's just as baffling if you can't see the stones for the moss. I am sure you will realize——' he stopped suddenly and a curious kind of relief came over his face as he glanced over my shoulder. I looked round and there was Diana standing behind me.

"I rose at once. I have never pushed myself in where I was not wanted"—I wondered what Farjohn would have said to that!—"so I walked away, telling Diana pointedly I hoped she would have a

pleasant afternoon. If you had gone anywhere except to Monte Carlo I might have brought her to a proper state of mind by referring to a lonely husband in a foreign land, deserted by the wife who ought to be by his side. But as it was you who had done the desertion, and were probably thoroughly enjoying yourself, I felt it might fall flat.

"Also if the family fortune is to be squandered it would go twice as fast if Diana were with you than if you were there alone.

"It was not until I had left them I remembered that my question about how Mr. Lanham spent his time had never been answered. No doubt he had good reason for it.

"I met Miss Lorne as I passed through the winter garden—Miss 'Highbrow' I believe you call her. That young woman is deeper than she looks in my opinion. As she was making for the terrace I nearly told her she wasn't wanted there, but thought better of it. Two may be company, but three—in some circumstances—is safer. So I said nothing about it.

"'Are you on the trail of the emeralds like everybody else, Miss Lorne?' I asked. 'We seem to see very little of you.'

"'No,' she replied, hardly pausing in her walk, 'I take no interest in emeralds.'

"'Don't you want to know who did the murder?'

"'Not in the least,' she answered, 'I should consider it morbid curiosity.'

"'I am glad the police don't look on it like that,' I replied tartly, 'or we should all be murdered in our beds and nobody hung for it.'

"'I am against capital punishment,' she said

earnestly, 'I'll lend you a book about it—when I have time,' and off she went without waiting for anything I might be going to say.

"That, I think, Humphrey, is all my news. If anything were to happen—no Goodlake has been in the Divorce Court yet, nor, I hope, ever will be—I should never forgive myself if I had remained silent and said nothing about what was going on under my nose. I make no accusations, but I told you my opinion frankly before your marriage. You can never reproach me with not having been perfectly open. I am not quite a fool and can put two and two together——" but at this point I became what is colloquially called—fed up! I crumpled the letter in my hand, and then to make assurance still more sure, tore it into small pieces, and threw it with an accompanying anathema into the nearest waste-paper basket!

Really Albinia was the limit!

My Diana! That such thoughts should be harboured about her for a moment!—and yet I went slowly up the stairs to my room, wondering why it was that no sting ever yet failed to leave a drop of poison behind it.

Not that for a moment I distrusted my wife's good faith and the will to be loyal; but might not circumstances be too much for her? I had heard the old saying about youth calling to youth quoted *ad nauseam*, but the fact that I had turned a deaf ear to it would not necessarily shake the foundation of truth upon which it stood. The human heart, for all man's boast about the human will, is a wayward instrument, as often master as servant; it can be blown hither and thither by any vagrant breeze,

and the mischief done before the owner is aware that mischief even lurks.

How often I had heard of old fires—boy-and-girl love affairs in the past—long since supposed to be dead, breaking out again into living flame—the ashes only smouldering after all. At first, just comradeship renewed, old associations, common interests, memories with just a flavour of romance about them, drifting insensibly into a something more intimate, the magic of youth, colouring the hours as only youth can, painting life with pigments that only youth understands.

How could I blame her ?—but at that point every instinct of loyalty I possess—even of common sense—rose up and mouthed at me !

I was a fool—and Albinia was something worse, and I should have great pleasure in telling her so when I got back.

Why shouldn't Diana scour the country with any companion she chose if it pleased her ? The very freedom of it robbed it of any doubtful flavour. Albinia was an idiot ! I had been very nearly one too—but not quite !

From my open window letting in the soft air, cooled and salted by the Mediterranean, I could see across the harbour, twinkling with lights from many boats and smaller shipping, reflected in long, shimmering pathways over the still water. Immediately below lay the courts and roofs of Monaco—in daylight red, pink, scarlet and purple in the shadows —now lit up by the glare of many lamps, blurred by the drifting smoke, trailing heavenwards from innumerable chimneys. Palm leaves spread like monster fans cast shadows across illuminated walls,

and beyond the winking lights of the sleeping craft in the harbour, the golden haze brooding over the town and the pale glare of the broad stretch of the Condamine, the Rock loomed, scarcely visible, a darker indigo against an indigo sky, betrayed by a thousand pin-pricks of light and the faintly luminous halo hovering over the palace and the ancient town.

A dream ! A poem !—and the Casino ? Entertaining fools perhaps—more often than knaves. Anyway I turned my back on it—and enjoyed the view.

I lay awake that night till the small hours, and at about two o'clock the question flashed into my mind that was to give me so many anxious hours.

Lying there in the dark and the silence, except for an occasional distant tread of some vigilant gendarme sounding hollow in the empty street, I went over in my mind the events of the day. So often when rebuilding scenes in one's mind's eye and visualizing the results of action one is inclined to distrust the conclusions arrived at.

I had been so convinced that my visit to La Turbie would lead to something definite that on looking back I wondered if I had really done all that was possible to find Place de la Montagne. It was only a small town ; surely there could be no higher appeal than the post office in a quest after a given address ? Ought I to have gone to the Mairie—if there were such a place in the town ? That postmaster might have been in uncommunicative mood, out of temper, quite likely had a down on the English ; there were half a dozen explanations when I came to think of it that might be applicable.

His assumed ignorance might have been pure cussedness. Ought I to have pushed inquiry further ?

The unexpected appearance of Farjohn had distracted my attention a bit from the immediate matter in hand, linking him up with the writer of the letter, and filling my brain with the problem of how to find him. The Casino had yielded no results ; I had kept watch at the entrance steps in vain. Wherever the man might be, it was not at the tables ; he might have spotted me at the station and taken alarm.

What in the name of common sense could have been the object of the anonymous letter ? I had walked warily, so to speak, avoiding dark streets, or lonely-looking alleys. Not that there had been anything sinister or secret about the little town on the hill-side ; no narrow streets with over-hanging eaves to cast convenient shadows. And I had come to no harm. Why lure me to a supposed rendezvous and do nothing to me when they had got me there !

And then, arriving by slow degrees, the alternative suggested itself.

What if my absence from Paignhamstead had been the end in view—rather than my presence elsewhere ?

A question that was immediately followed by another.

Why should my absence be desired unless for some sinister reason ?—unless, in fact, designs of a nefarious character were on foot ?—probably against Diana ?

Of course that was it ! The letter had been sent

to get me out of the way. Fool that I had been not to tumble to it when the address at La Turbie proved to be false!

The thought drove sleep to the nethermost corner of the earth. Diana in danger—what particular danger the Lord only knew—but anyway wanting my help perhaps, and I not there to give it!

CHAPTER XXIV

MAN is a queer animal!

I don't suppose it would have been possible to experience a more unpleasant thirty hours or so than those I spent in train and steamer on the return journey to Paignhamstead. Anxiety, in its rawest and crudest form; remorse at having ever been tempted to leave Diana, and impatience at enforced inaction, played havoc with my nerves, and left indelible traces that would last to the end of my life. Never had train appeared to travel so slowly, porters been more dilatory, or official red tape more exasperating than during those long-drawn-out hours.

It was therefore the less explicable that when at the entrance to the hotel Diana herself met me, hale and very cheerful, my first emotion took the form of a lively irritation!

"What the dickens is the matter with you?" was Diana's greeting, adding fuel to the fire. "You look like nothing on earth!"

"Of course I look like nothing on earth—I feel it," was my retort. "So would you if you hadn't slept a wink last night, and suffered the tortures of the damned for hours since!"

"But why?" she asked, "what's been up?"

"A good deal has been up—as you so idiomatically put it. I thought something might have happened to you."

"And you're annoyed because it hasn't," she laughed; I laughed too, and slipped an arm round her as relief got the better of irritation.

"It *is* aggravating to be anxious about somebody and then find you have been overdoing it!" she agreed.

"I was so anxious," I went on, indifferent to Albinia's appearance on the top step, "that I nearly cabled to the inspector to keep an eye on you till I got back."

Albinia sniffed, with a has-it-already-come-to-that expression on her face that fortunately escaped Diana.

"If you had dared I should have got a divorce," she replied airily.

"You can't get a divorce for a thing like that," Albinia put in. "The customs of the young married woman of to-day——"

"Are very much the same as yesterday, only nowadays we make more noise about it; the bread-and-butter miss liked a scrape of caviare in the butter as much as the rest of us, and often as not she got it," Diana retorted, "—and didn't say anything about it."

"I don't know what you call caviare——" Albinia began; but I took Diana by the elbow and piloted her gently round the house out of hearing, leaving Albinia still hovering on the top step, talking about caviare to the empty air.

We drifted across the terrace to the lawn where, except for the Verilees pair seated under a tree in the distance, no one was in sight.

"Now tell me all about it!" Diana exclaimed, and I was sorry to be obliged to damp her excite-

ment. "What did you find at La Turbie and who murdered Bertram Goodlake and what is the clue at High Oaks and have you got the emeralds?" she asked in one breath.

Reluctantly I brought her airy edifice to the ground. I told her everything that had taken place since I had seen her last; of my arrival at Monaco, the glimpse of Farjohn at the station, my vain quest of him round the town and at the Casino, and finally of the blank I had drawn at La Turbie.

"And if you can make anything of the puzzle, I cannot," I finished, "especially since seeing you."

"Why since seeing me?"

"Because after finding the letter had been a hoax, and the address given didn't even exist, I jumped to the conclusion that its object had been only to draw me to Monte Carlo. You may say that was stupid of me. So it was, but it followed a train of thought suggested by the meeting of Farjohn at the station. The two incidents seemed unlikely to be due to coincidence."

"It *would* have seemed a bit too thick," she observed thoughtfully.

"Then as no attack had been made on me, nor anything happened to account for having lured me over, the reason that should have been the first to strike me jumped into my brain with a sickening insistence—that it was my absence from Paignhamstead that had been desired—not my presence on the other side of the water; and for that there could only be one reason—that an attack of some kind on you was in progress, and I had to be got out of the way! And here you are, thank God, well and quite undisturbed by all I have gone through

on your account—and," I added, "if those Verilees people weren't over there in sight of us, I would——"

"No, you wouldn't," she interposed; "remember we have been married a whole year, and Albinia is watching you from the winter garden. It would be a pity to disabuse her of the suspicion that you already repent of having married me. What are you going to do next?" she asked abruptly.

"I shall go up to High Oaks to-morrow and see if anything has happened there. I should very much like," I said viciously, "to get to the bottom of this business, and discover who sent me on a wild-goose chase across the Channel!"

"It may have been the inspector himself," Diana suggested carelessly.

"My dear girl!" I remonstrated, "if Scotland Yard wanted to get me out of the way they would find other means of doing so than through an anonymous letter."

"You can't tell what they'd do if it suited their purpose," she rejoined, and proceeded to repair the wear and tear presumably caused by my recital with the help of the small mirror. "That police man"—she pronounced it as two words—"is still barking up the Dawkins tree, I believe, instead of looking for the clue I am perfectly certain is somewhere at High Oaks."

"You have had a good look for it yourself and haven't found anything enlightening," I reminded her.

"Are you going to tell him about the letter?"

I hesitated.

"It depends. If it turns out to have been a

hoax, pure and simple, just somebody's idea of a joke, I don't see why I should say anything about it. I am not anxious to let him know I have been fooled." I laughed. "But if it should turn out there was anything behind it, then I shall make a clean breast of it."

"Here's Mona," Diana remarked as Mrs. Vaughan appeared on the terrace. "I said I would go into Paignhamstead with her to do some shopping, but as you have come back I shan't go—besides, it's close on dinner-time. We went to High Oaks to find her bag—as I told you in my letter—you got my letter, didn't you?" I nodded, and she finished, "otherwise I haven't been near the place."

"Back from your little flutter, Mr. Goodlake? Diana gave you away, you know," Mrs. Vaughan smiled from the terrace steps. "How is Monte Carlo? I used to love it once, but I haven't been there for years."

I answered suitably, muttered something about it's being time to dress and left them talking.

In the morning I came to a sudden decision—or I thought I had—a decision in no way instigated by Albinia's letter. I had definitely put all her insinuations and dark hints out of my mind. To harbour them for a moment would be unworthy of both Diana and myself. She should spend the hours with whom she chose, and I resolved to speak to my sister very plainly, and make her understand that if friendly relations were to be kept up between us, she must keep her opinions to herself.

But to make a decision is a different thing from

carrying it out. It's a way the gods have, to wait until you have definitely decided to put certain plans into operation, and then to drop a bomb which will put an end to them all.

I was to get my bomb all right !

" Diana," I began as we neared the end of breakfast beside a wide-open window overlooking the lawn, " what good exactly are we doing here ? For all the ice we are cutting we might just as well be in our own house instead of living in a hotel and incidentally running up fairly stiff bills. Why not go home ? "

Peter Lanham, seated opposite breaking open an egg, pricked up his ears.

" I suppose I shall be obliged to get back to business soon," he remarked, and Albinia threw me a meaning glance which I professed not to see.

" You have been fairly idle the last fortnight, haven't you ? " she said scathingly.

" Depends what you call idle," he countered.

Diana looked at me doubtfully, and was on the point of answering my question when unfortunately Albinia put her oar in.

" I think you are quite right, Humphrey—to go back to London—with Diana," she added with emphasis. " A woman's place is in her own home——"

" And by her husband's side," Diana murmured.

" ——it's a pity you didn't think of it sooner."

" I couldn't bear to leave Dr. Delmico," Diana said gravely, " —and there he is," and, for Albinia's benefit, no doubt, she waved her hand airily to him as he threaded his way between the tables, at which unusual demonstration the man was so

astonished that he collided with a waiter carrying plates. "I hope he won't ask me if my intentions are strictly honourable—because they aren't," and, pushing her chair back, she drifted out of the room, followed by Albinia's disapproving eyes and an audible giggle from Lanham.

I was smoking a cigar on the lawn some hours later, reading *The Times*, when my sister reappeared. She seemed disturbed, came through the long window opening on to the terrace, looked cautiously round as though to make sure the coast was clear, and spotted me sitting alone on the lawn. That seemed to decide her; she crossed the terrace and descended the steps, planting each foot, with the toes turned out a little over-much, firmly on the ground. On her face was the look of dogged determination that always warned me to look out for squalls. This time I decided the squalls should not all come from one side.

It was no use pretending not to see her, and it was too late to take cover.

"Humphrey," she began, dropping into an adjacent chair.

"Look here, Albinia," I said irritably, "I didn't read through your letter to me in France, and I am not going to listen to you now——"

"Wait till you hear what I have got to say," she interrupted.

"That is exactly what I am telling you I won't do," I snapped.

"I am not going to talk about Diana," she protested, and I noticed her face was flushed; she seemed badly upset about something.

"What is it then?" I asked curtly.

"It's Mr. Lanham—something I have just discovered—that I feel you ought to know." She stared at me with set lips, all the Christian martyrs rolled into one looking out of her eyes.

I still distrusted her.

"Well—what's the matter with Lanham?"

"He has behaved disgracefully—much worse than you have any idea of—"

"Now, Albinia, I won't have it," I broke in. "If you and I are to remain on good terms you will let Diana alone—what she may choose to do is my business, not yours."

"I don't agree with you," she replied emphatically. "When a woman takes your name it's the whole family's business if she drags it in the mud——"

"Albinia!" I thundered, throwing the paper aside, "if you dare to imply——"

"I didn't," she protested, "I am not talking about Diana. It was you who began to talk about her. I was only giving you my opinion."

I said nothing. I couldn't make her out. She seemed even more disturbed than when Farjohn got off through the hole in the vault.

"What are you driving at?" I asked tersely.

"I am telling you about Mr. Lanham," she went on, sitting very upright in the chair. "I know everybody is lax about behaviour in these days—very different from when you and I were young——" she paused there, probably hoping I would protest; but I didn't, I wanted to hear what she had to say, "—but there is a limit. You will agree with me that far, I presume?"

Another pause. I nodded.

"You know how everybody is hunting for the emeralds," she went on, "when it's the murderer they ought to be looking for——"

"The one will probably lead to the other," I put in. "We don't really know what the clue—if we ever find it—will point to."

"Mr. Lanham professed to be as keen as all the rest—off on a line of his own—busy all day—no one knew where. I told you if I waited at the front door to see him start, he went off from the back; and if I watched from the window at the end of the corridor that looks into the back yard, I found he had started from the front. I guessed there was something wrong, Humphrey——and," she finished triumphantly, "now I know it!"

"Well, Albinia—keep it to yourself," I said, "and if it makes you ill you can see a doctor about it."

"I saw them myself," she went on as though I hadn't spoken, "with my own eyes; so I am not speaking on hearsay."

"Hearsay or not—I am not going to listen to any more——" I rose and threw the end of my cigar into the bushes beyond the tree. My hand was shaking, I was very angry.

"They were sitting on the bench at the edge of the wood, his arm was round her—Mr. Lanham's arm—I couldn't believe it——"

Albinia also rose, and we stood glaring at one another—there is no other word for it.

"Her head was on his shoulder, and as I watched them—he kissed her!—one of those long kisses like the close-ups, as they call them, you see in the films—what's the matter?" she broke off

and stared at me, eyes wide open. If my face was index to my feelings she might well stare.

"Albinia," I said slowly, "let me tell you—I don't believe one single word! I warned you I would not have Diana's name mentioned——"

She looked puzzled.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "I *haven't* mentioned Diana's name?"

"That's quibbling," I rejoined.

"I am quite willing to admit I was mistaken about Diana."

It was my turn to look puzzled.

"Then what are you talking about?"

"About Mr. Lanham—kissing Miss 'Highbrow,'" she replied. "I have been telling you about it all along only you wouldn't listen!"

"Miss 'Highbrow'! Do you mean Miss Lorne?" I gasped.

"Of course I do," she retorted, "who else?—and of all the underhand, deceitful creatures Mr. Lanham comes in first! Following up a trail of his own!"

"Well—he was in a way," I began, in a voice that shook from many emotions. "Good old Peter!" and I dropped back into my chair and laughed till the tears—metaphorically—ran down my face.

"Albinia," I began when I could speak, "if I were you I should give up sleuthing. It isn't your line, and some day you'll get landed! Let Scotland Yard do its own work."

But on looking up I found I was alone.

CHAPTER XXV

THAT I had been inveigled into a fruitless journey across the Channel fell into comparative insignificance beside the fact of Diana's safety. Evidently no hostile move against her had been intended. But the question of what then had been its object still remained unanswered.

That it had been merely a mischievous, objectless hoax I did not believe. There would have been no point in it. My friends were not built on those lines; there was nothing in it either witty or amusing, and the only conclusion to be drawn from it was proof that some person—or persons—was still actively engaged on the quest after the emeralds.

The apparent inaction of the police and want of success among the rest of us either to locate the jewels or recognize a "clue" had lulled my mind into an idea that there was "nothing doing". Every inquiry had led into a blind alley, no thread we had laid hand upon had done more than prove it was hopelessly tangled up with other threads.

A visit to High Oaks might afford some inkling of the meaning behind that anonymous letter, but I had been disappointed so often that I did not feel very hopeful. Diana had something to do in Paignhamstead which she had put off from the previous afternoon, so we arranged she should drive herself into the town after luncheon, and join me at High

Oaks later on. At about three o'clock I started to walk up to the house—little thinking I was entering on the final stage of the most perplexing and tragic problem with which I had ever been confronted.

Suggestion plays a big part in life. It is astonishing how the faintest passing impulse touching from outside whatever brain cell is responsible for the association of one event with another—the least little spur to memory—can colour a place, or person, or incident, and transform it from sober fact into fantasy; can take the reality and twist it into a distorted semblance of itself, a beautiful dream or a caricature, as the case may be.

As I walked up the drive on that pleasant summer's afternoon, beneath the shade of red-stemmed pines and beech leaves, already russet-tipped, heralding an early autumn, the house in full view, I wondered what the heart of man, loving the English countryside, could have wished for further in the shape of a house to live in. The rough grey stone, surmounted by red tiles, of every shade tempered by the weather of a few hundred years, standing out vividly against a background of tall fir trees; the mullioned windows, pointed gables and overhanging eaves. A picture of a house—right size, right shape, right everything, and yet because of the suggestion lying behind it all, the last place on God's earth where either Diana or I would wish to live! Just one of the tricks played by Fate on helpless humanity.

My first proceeding was to go all over the building beginning with the attics, to see if anything unusual revealed itself. The hall was to all appearance as I had left it; everything in order, the China-

man looming, a solemn sentinel, in his customary corner, the sun glancing in with an effect of forced cheerfulness through a mullioned window, throwing a crossbar design across the floor. The dining-room shrouded decorously in holland covers, the upper rooms, all seemed undisturbed by alien hand. Upstairs everything seemed in order. The attics, empty except for an old packing-case or two, thick with dust, showing signs of partial disturbance where the foot or hand of Scotland Yard had roused it from its long sleep. I coughed and sneezed, and closed the door behind me, satisfied by the perfunctory glance that no solution to the mystery was to be found there.

The bedrooms, not quite so dusty, but not much of a testimonial to Mrs. Dawkins as a housemaid, the furniture covered by moth-eaten sheets, yielded nothing, and I descended the stairs to the hall no wiser than when I had mounted them.

It was not until I reached the back premises on the ground floor that I began to feel uneasy.

The back door, opening on to the shrubbery path, on which Mrs. Dawkins alleged she had found the cigarette-case, was unlocked—the key still in the door on the inside, but the door unlocked; whereas I knew it had been locked when I had left the place a few days previously. Since Dawkins and his wife had given up the caretaking, and there had been no need to use the back door, it had remained locked and only the front door used by myself or Diana.

Of course it was just possible I had opened it casually or forgotten to re-lock it; one does do little things like that mechanically at times, forgetting

the trifling incident afterwards. Or Diana might have been the offender. There is precious little one can be really certain of in this world.

But it aroused a feeling of uneasiness. I relocked the door and went into the library on the *qui vive*—suspicion awake and eyes alert for anything that might tell a tale of its own, and account in some way for what appeared to have been a useless journey to Monte Carlo.

We had all so thoroughly searched the library and pulled over everything in it, over and over, and again, and found nothing, that—suggestion again, I suppose—I had instinctively neglected it as being almost negligible as a hunting ground.

But—after throwing a searching glance round the room, and then coming down to a more detailed search—I found what I was looking for. And, having found it, laughed to think how barren of reward the intruder's enterprise had been!

Two only of the drawers in the writing-table had escaped the destructive attempts of my cousin's murderer, and into those drawers, as I think I have already explained, I had locked any among Bertram Goodlake's papers it had seemed advisable to keep, and the old bank-books and counterfoils.

These two drawers had evidently inflamed somebody's curiosity to such a point that they had been broken open and the contents, although restored to some sort of order, examined, presumably in the hope of discovering the "clue." That nothing could have been discovered I knew well enough, for the excellent reason there was nothing to discover—or if there were it had eluded *my* understanding.

The Delmico counterfoil, which it might have been in someone's interest to destroy, was in the hands of the inspector ; perhaps it was natural the suspicion should be instantly re-aroused in my mind—had the " professor " been the uninvited guest, and was Drewsbury wrong in concluding that the cheque had been made out to an artists' colourman of that name ?

Anyway he had a good watertight alibi for the night of the murder. There was no getting round his presence at a public dinner in London at the time. His might have been the brain that instigated it, but another hand must have carried it out. I didn't like the man, but that was no reason he should be a criminal. I was fingering the covers of an old cheque-book with counterfoils attached when something with a gentle sort of insistence began to knock at the door of my brain.

And then I saw it. I ran through several bunches of the counterfoils, to make sure.

All those with the name *Durande* on them had been removed. I was sure of it because there was none left ; but they had been cut out so skilfully with a very sharp knife that I had to go carefully through the numbers and note the gaps to find out exactly how many had been removed.

I counted in all seven counterfoils missing. There might have been more, but the number was of no importance. The point was, somebody had wished to remove all record of the name Durande from Bertram Goodlake's cheque-books.

Could the clue have lain hidden there ? If so, it didn't seem very helpful, it certainly conveyed nothing to me. Neither had the theft benefited

the criminal, for the very fact of the removal of the name had attracted my special attention to it. No doubt it had been hoped I had not yet looked through the counterfoils, or if I had, should not notice the abstraction of the Durande records.

I re-locked the drawers and wandered restlessly about the room. I felt curiously uneasy. Who could have wanted those counterfoils ?—and who was Durande ? One thing was certain—I must make a clean breast of it to the police.

There was enough now to go upon ; that call to Monte Carlo might have been a hoax, but it was a hoax with a method in it. I resolved to tell the inspector without delay of the anonymous letter and the raid made on my property in my absence. I decided to start at once, hoping to catch him in Paignhamstead, as the less time lost over it the better.

On second thoughts I changed my mind—I wonder now what the end of this story would have been had I not done so ! Firstly, there was the arrangement with Diana ; she was to join me on her return from Paignhamstead, and she had the car ; secondly—I felt in a curious frame of mind.

I have never taken any interest in what the psychic people say—that the dead are still within reach and can influence our lives, and know what we are doing, but I am bound to admit that moving uneasily round the room, in a manner quite foreign to my usual habits, I could have sworn my old cousin was somewhere about, and egging me on to something. That at least is what it felt like, it is the only way I can describe it. I have never had before or since so definite a sensation of an unseen

presence as I had that afternoon, at the spot where Bertram Goodlake had been done to death. I couldn't keep still, something was urging me to do—I didn't know what.

I laughed at myself for a fool, lit a cigarette, let it go out, threw it away ; wondered if I had overlooked any of the papers locked up ; unlocked the drawers, turned some of them over, knew I should find nothing fresh—I was beginning to know them by heart ; locked them up again, and stared vacantly out of the window. It was through that window I had seen Albinia stalking Farjohn at the bottom of the field, and I smiled to think how her sleuthing had crashed, and wondered again what Farjohn had been doing in Monte Carlo. I did not seem to be able to think about anything connectedly.

Then I moved from the window to the studio end of the room, and, rather to my surprise, Mrs. Vaughan appeared at the door leading into the hall. The sight of her pulled me together, I felt myself again, the cobwebs swept from my brain.

I was expecting Diana and disappointment was evidently quite apparent on my face.

" No," she said, standing in the doorway, " I am not Diana. I have been looking for her ever since lunch. Where is she ? "

" She has gone into Paignhamstead in the car," I replied, " and will be here to fetch me directly."

" I found the front door open, so I came in," and as I said nothing, added : " You haven't had any luck, I suppose ? " She leant her slim figure against the door-frame and looked round the room.

" If you mean—have I found the emeralds, or

the clue to them—no," I rejoined gloomily, wishing she would go and deliberately abstaining from inviting her to come in.

She looked round curiously.

"It is extraordinary that nothing has been found," she remarked. "Do you think your cousin could have been mad? I tell you frankly, I don't believe there ever was a secretary, and——" she laughed, "possibly no emeralds either."

"Quite possible," I replied curtly.

"Of course I don't want to appear inquisitive," she went on, "but it does seem odd that nothing has turned up, don't you think? The police seem to be so very uncommunicative. Do you think they know more than they admit?"

"If they don't admit it, how can we know?" I asked.

She laughed.

"I suppose not." She was silent for a minute, and I moved back to the writing-table trying to look busy, but she refused to take the hint.

"You found everything all right when you got back?" she persisted, looking round again curiously.

"Quite—why not?" I answered impatiently. I had no intention of revealing the raid on the locked drawers. "The inspector keeps an eye on everything."

"Quite," she echoed, and I thought for a moment she was amusing herself at my expense.

But there was no smile on her face, and I turned to the sketch on the easel. The woman was getting on my nerves. I wondered what Diana was doing and what was keeping her so late.

As my eyes lingered on the now familiar little picture a phrase came into my mind—vaguely, like the echo of a song. It was running in my brain without conveying any meaning.

Mrs. Vaughan's eyes followed mine.

"I can't make out why you like that sketch so much," she commented, "I see nothing out of the way in it."

"Perhaps that is the reason. It's soothing and suggests everything that appeals to one most. Nature smiling—friendly—everything it generally isn't."

Mrs. Vaughan laughed.

"You are a pessimist, I am afraid, Mr. Goodlake!"

I made no answer. What was it, I wondered, that made the little sketch so attractive? There was nothing much in it when you came to look at it—just a sunny garden, a weather-worn brick wall, trees and the mottled shadows of them making patterns across the green sward in the foreground.

Again there ran through my mind a phrase—the picture seemed to be trying to tell me something.

"——at the back of the old wall; the sun makes a pattern on the grass." A pattern on the grass! At last the message reached me!

The room, the books in their glass cases, the writing-table with its sinister memories, Mrs. Vaughan, still watching me from the doorway, all faded from the field of my consciousness. I saw nothing but the picture before me on the easel.

There was the old wall—the sunshine—the pattern on the grass!

"I've got it—at last!" I cried, regardless of who

heard me. "At the back of the old wall! That's it!"

Blind for the moment in my excitement to everything else in the world, including Mrs. Vaughan, who was making no attempt to conceal her curiosity I caught up the sketch and turning it round stared at the back.

Brown paper—nothing more, gummed at the extreme edges. Not much in that!

I passed a penknife round it carefully and, detaching the brown paper, let it fall to the floor.

A large photograph confronted me. The sketch had been painted on the back of it. Across the foot in my cousin's crabbed handwriting was clearly written:

"My secretary—Marie Durande. Rio——" the date——and the face that looked back at me from the photograph was the face of Mona Vaughan!

I turned—to find a wicked-looking automatic pointed at me from the doorway.

CHAPTER XXVI

"SO that was the clue!—lying there for you to pick up all the time," Mrs. Vaughan's voice said from behind the automatic, while her eyes looked steadily into mine. "I am sorry, Humphrey Goodlake—I have no count against you except that you have found me out! But one may as well be hung for two murders as one, and unless you hand over that photograph and give your word of honour to say nothing to the police—or anyone—for four and twenty hours, I shall shoot you!"

It would be folly to say I was unperturbed. I was in her hands—unarmed, half a dozen yards from the business end of an automatic, and a table between us. A sudden spring would be futile—and I had a game leg.

If any man has been in the same situation and not wished he wasn't, I hope he'll speak up.

It looked pretty hopeless, and I did not dare so much as to think of Diana—for of course I had no intention of forswearing every tradition of honour and straight dealing by giving in to her demand.

"I might give you my word, but there would not be much honour about it," I remarked, and added in a voice that sounded steady enough, "you have a very pretty taste in melodrama."

"I mean what I say," she snapped, "make no

mistake about that. I don't want particularly to shoot you, but you have got to make up your mind without any shilly-shallying." The muzzle of the objectionable little weapon never wavered for a second, and she added: "I'll give you three minutes —for Diana's sake!" and she gave a little derisive laugh.

She got me there! The callous brutality of it made me see red, but before I could speak something very curious happened.

Beyond her, across the sunlit hall, a shadow flitted—that is the only way I can describe it—a shadow fleet and silent. I saw it with the tail of my eye through the open door. Naturally I had kept my gaze fixed on the weapon that threatened me, but now, caught by the glimpse of movement in the hall, I shifted my eyes instinctively to look over her shoulder through the open door.

"That's no good," she sneered, "we have all heard of that trick! Somebody behind me, I suppose——"

Before she finished the sentence, the light through the doorway was suddenly blocked out, her elbows were seized from behind, the automatic clattered on to the floor, and a sharp click of metal at her wrists told me that Mona Vaughan—as we had known her—with her insatiable thirst for wealth and unscrupulous determination to get it, would never again be a danger to the community.

From behind her, to my surprise, Farjohn stepped forward. I had expected the inspector.

"Just in time, Mr. Goodlake," he remarked and, putting a hand on the woman's shoulder, said slowly: "Marie Durande, I arrest you in the name

of the law, and remember that anything you say may be used against you!"

Some hours later Inspector Drewsbury walked into the winter garden at the hotel, where Diana and I were awaiting him.

"How on earth did you do it?" I asked. "By what lucky chance did Farjohn turn up not a minute too soon?"

"He was rather afraid of being a minute too late!" was the rejoinder. "Not that he knew what you were going to find at the back of that picture, but from inquiries at the hotel, he gathered you were alone with the woman at High Oaks, and he didn't trust her."

"How did you find it all out?" I repeated as he settled himself into the chair I pushed forward.

He drew contentedly at the cigar I had supplied, and smiled.

"Farjohn did most of the trailing. He's a good man that! That's why I put him on to the job. Nice-looking feller too—people don't mind talking before him, and I thought if he posed to be a visitor at the Paignhamstead Arms he might pick up bits of information—which he did. You see we argued like this," he sent a thin film of smoke flying upwards and settled himself back among the cushions, "after reading that letter of yours, Mr. Goodlake—whoever it was did the murder was after the emeralds. Now Mr. Bertram Goodlake, knowing what he did about the secretary, wouldn't have been such a fool as to have the emeralds on him—nor within reach, so we could pretty well reckon

the murderer didn't *get* the emeralds. He shot his victim and then drew a blank."

"That's sound," I put in. "I never thought myself he had—or, I should say, she."

"Having committed a murder on account of the jewels, it wasn't likely he—or she—was going to throw up the sponge at once, especially as almost immediately talk of a clue up at High Oaks began to get about. So we argued that, although we might be making inquiries for the secretary in foreign parts, it would be just as well to keep an eye on the immediate neighbourhood.

"We ruled the 'loony' out from the start. It would have been pretty well impossible for him to have got hold of a pistol, and there was no evidence at all to show that he had. I never really suspected Dawkins—nor that virago of a wife of his—they weren't the type; and then again, where would they have got the weapon from? Mr. Goodlake's own automatic could not have been used, for, if you remember, sir, it was found fully loaded at the back of the writing-table drawer across which the body had fallen?"

I nodded. It was proved at the time my cousin could not have been murdered with his own pistol.

"The seafaring nephew was shown, on inquiry, to have been in the Bay of Biscay on his way home at the time the crime was committed, so he was put out of court."

"No one could wish for a more complete alibi," I smiled. "My own, if I remember rightly, was far less satisfactory."

The inspector laughed.

"Red tape can't be disregarded—which was all

it was in your case, sir. But this process of elimination was leaving the field rather bare of possible suspects—and then Farjohn tumbled on the first real clue. That is what so often happens—subsequent developments may be the result of grey matter, but the first clue is as often as not what would be called chance."

He paused a moment, drew a whiff or two from the cigar with evident satisfaction, and then, looking thoughtfully at the bright end of it, resumed :

" It came about through the cigarette-case. If Mrs. Dawkins hadn't chanced to pick that case up in the pathway leading to the back of the house I don't know that we should ever have touched the right button—unofficial, sir, that admission——" he looked at me with a smile, " but there had been nothing to link Mrs. Vaughan up with the affair and, even with the first clue staring him in the face, Farjohn failed to tumble to it straight off."

" What was it ? " I asked, and Diana leant forward, eagerness in her eyes. She had never been sufficiently attracted, I am glad to say, to the woman we had known as Mrs. Vaughan for it to weigh in the balance for a moment against the horror of a detestable crime.

" One evening, as you may remember—I believe you were present—Farjohn quite innocently borrowed Mrs. Vaughan's match-box, a silver one, and as he was about to return it he caught sight of some lettering on the surface. It was an inscription, and before he knew what he was doing he had read it. It didn't seem to amount to much : ' May this spark good luck invoke '—just a good wish from an admirer perhaps, but the words awoke some

memory in his brain, and in a minute or two the cigarette-case, which I had shown him when putting him wise to the situation, came into his mind :

'And all your trouble end in smoke'

had apparently been the tail-end of some tag or other, engraved upon it. The two fitted.

'May this spark good luck invoke
And all your trouble end in smoke'—

and that made him first sit up and take special interest in the so-called Mrs. Vaughan.

"But it was not sufficient evidence to take action on. That line might have been inscribed on more than one match-box, with a cigarette-case completing the couplet. If Mrs. Vaughan denied ownership it might take a good bit of work to get it home to her. But from that moment the trailing began in earnest.

"Farjohn then noticed the lady had a fancy—unusual nowadays—for wearing gloves. Professing to take an interest in the search for the emeralds, he joined the party at High Oaks and found his conjecture confirmed—Mrs. Vaughan always wore gloves when on the premises, possibly uncertain whether she might not have inadvertently left a finger-print in the first instance ; never for a moment did she allow her bare hands to touch anything inside the house or out. That added a bit to his suspicions, and a visit to the lady's room at the hotel, conducted secretly and perhaps not entirely in accord with regulations, followed by the discovery of an automatic at the back of a drawer, wrapped up in a pair of silk stockings, almost justified immediate action. But not quite, and he

wished to avoid putting the lady on her guard before he was ready."

The police officer looked at me here with a twinkle in his usually cold, steely eyes.

"Miss Goodlake, unfortunately, caught a sight of him in the corridor outside Mrs. Vaughan's room, and she at all events thought she had enough evidence to take action!"

So, I thought to myself, he had known about it all the time! I, too, smiled.

"She based her suspicions, I was told, on the fact of having seen Farjohn previously in an hotel where the theft of a pearl necklace had taken place, and jumped to the conclusion that his presence on both occasions pointed to his guilt. She forgot she herself had also been present both times, and that a detective's place is on the heels of crime. Luckily, there was a hole at the end of that impromptu prison-house," he went on, "and with a chuckle Farjohn returned to the hotel and went straight off to Monte Carlo, where he fancied he might pick up a bit about the so-called Mrs. Vaughan. He was sure now he was on the right scent. Only an adventuress was likely to travel about with a very business-like automatic concealed in a pair of stockings."

"So that was what he was after when I met him," I remarked; "not flying from justice, as I imagined."

"He saw you all right at Monaco station," the inspector went on, "but thought it better not to speak. He would have had to confess he was a C.I.D. man, and the truth is, so many zealous amateurs were mixing themselves up in this affair

that the trail promised to be queered, and I thought it better to confide in no one—not even you, sir," he added deprecatingly.

So Farjohn *had* seen me—and given no more sign of it than a graven image! And of course had conveyed the news of my arrival at Monte Carlo to his chief. Was there anything these men didn't get hold of? The inspector probably knew all about the anonymous letter; Farjohn had possibly shadowed me—and I had made up my mind to keep the hoax a secret!

"Farjohn found out quite a lot at Monte Carlo," he continued, drawing a last whiff from the cigar and extinguishing the glowing end in an ash-tray. "He got into touch with the local authorities, and they soon identified the lady by the description of her. A search through the hotel registers revealed the fact that a Mr. Bertram Goodlake had been a visitor at the place some three years previously, had stayed there for a considerable period, and had become very friendly with a woman called Marie Durande—a woman from no one knew where, but as there was nothing definite against her it was nobody's business to look into her record."

"What sort of relations existed between them?" I asked. "Was she accepted by the respectable society of the place?"

"I can't say. Mr. Bertram Goodlake lived too much of a hermit's life to have been the means of introducing her to people of his own class. He amused himself in his own way, had a room overlooking the sea which he turned into a sort of studio—so the hotel people said—and pored for hours over the English newspapers."

"Crossword puzzles, no doubt," I observed, "he had a mania for them."

"The lady was continually with him—after his money probably—either accompanying him on his sketching expeditions, or boxed up with him in the hotel, hunting about in books for something or other mostly——"

"Dictionaries," I murmured.

"——and in the end he took a room for her in the hotel, and called her his secretary. The opinion in the place seems to have been she was out for what she could pick up. A good-looking woman, and got round him, I suppose."

"Her nose is too long," I muttered.

"She *is* a good-looking woman," Diana assented.

"Finally, when Mr. Goodlake left Monte Carlo for—it was generally supposed—South America, Mrs. Durande, so she described herself, went with him as his secretary. That is as much information about her as Farjohn could pick up. It all took place some years back now, and there was nothing to mark either her or her employer for special observation—always the most baffling business—trying to trace respectable people with nothing against 'em—nobody takes any notice of 'em—lucky the head waiter at the hotel was an old servant, or we shouldn't have got as much to go on as we did.

"Anyway," he went on, "Farjohn had enough to go on with—the cigarette-case—the woman suspiciously careful to wear gloves, to avoid finger-prints—and her identification as the secretary—not to mention the automatic hidden in the silk stockings. He returned to England—learnt

at the Paignhamstead Arms you were up at High Oaks with the so-called Mrs. Vaughan, and—arrived just in time!

"Looking back, it is easy enough to follow up the crime step by step," he stared thoughtfully in front of him. "She must have followed or preceded him to England and was reconnoitring when Mrs. Dawkins heard the steps outside—she then hid in the bushes in the dusk and shot him in the hope of finding the jewels or some clue among his papers; was evidently disturbed by Dawkins's return, and dropped the cigarette-case either then or when she was previously prowling round the house—and no doubt thought she had lost it elsewhere, or she wouldn't have continued to use the match-box."

I nodded. The story seemed to unfold itself simply enough as the man of so much experience reconstructed it.

"The rest is plain. She joined the hunt at High Oaks in the hope of happening on the clue before anyone else, and when that failed sent you off on a wild-goose chase through an anonymous letter—made an excuse to visit the house with Mrs. Goodlake on the plea of having lost a bag, and surreptitiously leaving the back door open, returned at night to ransack the locked drawers, the only possible hiding-places she had not had an opportunity to explore." He paused. "What she didn't bargain for was the photo at the back of the picture—and it's one up to you, sir, for discovering it!"

Then, drawing a letter from his pocket, he added:

"Got this at the Yard this morning, sir—your business, not ours—so brought it along." He rose

abruptly as I took it from him and moved towards the door.

"Just one last word, sir," he said, pausing on the threshold, "—just as well if Farjohn and Miss Goodlake don't meet! There might be trouble!" and with the ghost of a smile was gone.

The letter was from a firm of bankers in Rio, and ran:

To Chief of the Criminal Intelligence Dept.

Sir,

Having read with regret of the murder of Mr. Bertram Goodlake, we hasten to inform you that about a year ago he left some valuable emeralds in our charge. We believe he intended to re-visit this country. We should be obliged for further instructions in this matter.

Yours faithfully,

HEENE, BENDIGO & SALVATOR,
Bankers.

* * * * *

"Well," I remarked, when a couple of days later we found ourselves settled once more in our own home, "the inspector was not quite such a fool as you thought."

"No," Diana replied, "I'll put him into my detective novel," and seating herself at the writing-table, with paper, pen and ink before her, she began to write.

Made and Printed in Great Britain by Ebenezer Baylis and Son, Limited, The Trinity Press, Worcester.
F25. 729

S0-ELF-781